

**WORD.  
WORLD.  
WISDOM.**

**National  
Institute for**  
Christian Education



**Educating for Hope  
Research Symposium  
Monday 4 May 2026**

Hosted at Alphacrucis University College, Parramatta, NSW



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# Welcome

*We are delighted to welcome you to our 2026 Educating for Hope Research Symposium. This annual gathering brings together Christian education scholars, researchers, school leaders, teachers, and practitioners from across Australia and overseas to share research, deepen conversation, and strengthen the life of Christian education. We are pleased to gather once again at Alphacrucis University College for a full day of connection, scholarly exchange, and encouragement.*



This year's theme, "Word. World. Wisdom." invites us to reflect carefully on the shape of Christian education in a time of significant cultural, technological, and moral change. The Word calls us back to theological vision: the centrality of Christ and the formative role of Scripture. The World draws our attention to the cultural contexts shaping our classrooms, institutions, and students. Wisdom turns to practice, asking what it means to form people for faithful, discerning, and hope-filled living.

Across keynote presentations, research papers, and conversations, we hope this day offers space for both intellectual rigour and spiritual attentiveness. Christian education requires scholars and practitioners who can hold theology, culture, and pedagogy together with clarity and compassionate care.

We are grateful for each person joining us today. Thank you for contributing your research, your questions, and your presence. May our time together be marked by thoughtful dialogue, generous exchange, and a shared commitment to an education rooted in the Word, responsive to the World, and shaped by Wisdom.

# Program

## NICE 2026 Annual Research Symposium Parramatta, NSW

Time	Program	Venue
8.00 am	REGISTRATIONS OPEN	Hall Foyer
8.30 am	NICE Welcome (Julia Verdouw) AC Welcome and Reflection (David Perry)	Chapel (Online Program)
8.45 am	<b>KEYNOTE (1) MIRIAM JESSIE FISHER</b> "Are Words Always Wisdom?"	Chapel (Online Program)
9.35 am	Book Launch (Jill Ireland) CEN events (Emily Brookes)	Chapel (Online Program)
9.45 am	<i>Concurrent Session One</i>	Chapel (Online Program) G-02 / G-04 / G-07
10.45 am	<b>MORNING TEA</b>	Foyer
11.15 am	<b>KEYNOTE (2) DAN ANDERSON</b> "Does not wisdom call? Does not understanding raise her voice?" —Proverbs 8:1 (ESV)	Chapel (Online Program)
12.00 pm	<i>Concurrent Session Two</i>	Chapel (Online Program) G-02 / G-04 / G-07
1.30 pm	<b>LUNCH</b>	Foyer
2.15 pm	<i>Concurrent Session Three</i>	Chapel (Online Program) G-02 / G-04 / G-07
3.15 pm	<b>KEYNOTE (3) PANEL DISCUSSION</b> Sam Burrows, with Miriam Jessie Fisher, Dan Anderson and Ben Myers "Wisdom at the Intersection"	Chapel (Online Program)
4.00 pm	Closing Remarks (Julia Verdouw)	Chapel (Online Program)
4.15 pm	<b>AFTERNOON TEA</b>	Foyer
5.00 pm	SYMPOSIUM CLOSE	

# Concurrent Sessions

Time	Chapel Online Program	Room G-02	Room G-04	Room G-07
<b>Session ONE</b>	<b>WISDOM</b> Chair: Sam Burrows	<b>WORD</b> Chair: Andrew Schmidt	<b>WISDOM</b> Chair: Emily Shea	<b>WORLD</b> Chair: Cassandra Pendlebury
9.45— 10.15 am	Yvonne Harvey	Dean McDonald	Peter Beamish (1)	Nate Armsberry
10.15— 10.45 am	Rebecca Moffat	Sam Waldron	Paul Matthews	Daniela Brown
<b>Session TWO</b>	<b>WORD</b> Chair: Chris Prior	<b>WORLD</b> Chair: Jill Ireland	<b>WISDOM</b> Chair: Fiona Partridge	<b>WISDOM</b> Chair: Michael Parzakonis
12.00— 12.30 pm	Sam Burrows	Rhonda Burns	Kyle Fifield	Chris Rayner Susan Westraad and Emily Shea (1)
12.30— 1.00 pm	Timothy Hewitt	Vladka Henley	Emily Lockhart	Elizabeth Hutchison
1.00— 1.30 pm	Rachel Pickering	Lindsay Fish	Miriam Lili	Cassandra Pendlebury and Emily Shea (2)
<b>Session THREE</b>	<b>WORD/WISDOM</b> Chair: Chris Rayner	<b>WORLD</b> Chair: Cathy Smith	<b>WISDOM</b> Chair: Miriam Lili	<b>WORLD/WISDOM</b> Chair: Rebecca Moffat
2.15— 2.45 pm	Danielle Terceiro Ben Myers	Peter Beamish (2)	Michael Street	Rebecca Gibson
2.45— 3.15 pm	Stephen Fyson	Jared Catchpoole		Emily Shea (3)

# Keynote Session One



## Miriam Jessie Fisher

**Interdisciplinary Lecturer—Education and Theology; Laidlaw College  
Aotearoa/New Zealand**

Miriam Jessie Fisher is an interdisciplinary lecturer in education and theology, a poet and textile artist. Her research interests include creativity and arts in education, spirituality and formation, and engagement between theology and imagination. Her work focuses on the Bible as our defining story, the one that vivifies all of our living. Methodologically, Miriam Jessie enacts research that combines traditional, intellectual, creative, and embodied expressions. She seeks to enact educational practice and theological expression that honours the context of Aotearoa, bicultural partnerships, te Reo me ona tikanga Māori, New Zealand sign language, and deaf culture. Miriam Jessie has qualifications in theology, education, supervision and drama.

### Abstract

#### **Are Words Always Wisdom?**

More often than not we construct our wisdom with very specific types of words. We have poured our lives and intellectual energies, (and for many of you those are vast!), into gathering knowledge to contribute meaningfully to the ongoing conversation, kōrero, talanoa that happens in educational fields. We seek to do this with fidelity to the vocation we have received from God. In this keynote Miriam Jessie seeks to offer us the gift of asking us about the moment we are in, the words we are currently using, and the results of these types of words of wisdom. Using arts-based research methodologies, theopoetics and poetry, she seeks to create a conversation where we can critique, interrogate and ask ourselves bravely how we can offer the gift of research to a world that is often locked behind paywalls, suspicion and cultural tropes. This keynote hopes to offer more questions than answers and to challenge all of us to a renewed vocation on behalf of wisdom in the world.

# Keynote Session Two



## Dan Anderson

### Director Lachlan Macquarie Institute

Rev Dr Dan Anderson is the director (CEO) of the Lachlan Macquarie Institute (LMI) based in Canberra, Australia. LMI's mission is to train wise Christian leaders for politics and culture. Prior to LMI, Dan worked in Christian ministry with university students in Sydney as the pastor/chaplain at Robert Menzies College, Trinity Chapel, and Macquarie University, and as a campus staff worker with Christian Union in Sydney and Canberra. Dan has served on a range of boards including as the chair of the Australian Fellowship of Evangelical Students (AFES) and is the current board chair of Emmaus Christian School (a CEN member). Dan holds a BA (Hons) from the ANU; BDiv from Moore College and a PhD from Macquarie University.

Dan is married to Emma and they have two children (Nat and Evie).

### Abstract

**"Does not wisdom call? Does not understanding raise her voice?" — Proverbs 8:1 (ESV)**

Together we will trace how Wisdom's invitation develops across the canon: from creation, through Torah, through the exercise of royal judgement, toward the promise of a law written on the heart, and into its fullness in Christ, in whom all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are hidden. From that movement emerges a particular conception of biblical wisdom: a way of seeing, judging, and living that is formed in us and among us by the creative Word. The address then considers what this means for Christian educators — asking what it means to internalise wisdom, what vision of reality wise judgement presupposes, and what kinds of teachers and communities are needed for wisdom's invitation to be heard today.

# Panel Session

## Wisdom at the Intersection

with Dr Miriam Jessie Fisher, Dan Anderson and Ben Myers  
and facilitated by Sam Burrows

### Ben Myers

**Deputy Vice President in Research, Alphacrucis  
University College**



Ben Myers is a professor of theology and literature, and the deputy vice president in research at Alphacrucis University College (AC). Ben oversees AC's research strategy and is responsible for enhancing AC's performance and reputation in research, research training, and partnerships. In previous roles, he has worked extensively in research and postgraduate supervision, and has been a research fellow at the University of Queensland, a lecturer at Charles Sturt University, and dean of liberal arts at Christian Heritage College. His international appointments have included visiting fellowships at Fuller Theological Seminary, the Center of Theological Inquiry in Princeton, and the Forschungszentrum Internationale und Interdisziplinäre Theologie (FIIT) at Heidelberg University. He is an adjunct of the Australian Centre for Christianity and Culture and the Centre for Religion, Ethics and Society at Charles Sturt University.

Ben is a specialist in theology and literature, with particular interests in seventeenth-century literature and modern theology. His publications include *Milton's Theology of Freedom* (de Gruyter), *Christ the Stranger: The Theology of Rowan Williams* (T&T Clark), and *The Apostles' Creed: A Guide to the Ancient Catechism* (Lexham), as well as numerous journal articles on theology and literature. His current research focuses on representations of God in poetry.

# Concurrent Session Speakers

## Welcome to our concurrent speaker sessions!

Our concurrent sessions are an opportunity to listen deeply, think generously, and engage meaningfully with the diverse scholarship and practice represented at this symposium. Each presenter has offered their work in a spirit of contribution and conversation. As you participate, we encourage you to listen with curiosity, ask thoughtful questions, and offer feedback that is both constructive and encouraging. May these sessions be spaces of shared learning, rich dialogue, and mutual strengthening as we reflect together on the work of Christian education.

Each session will include a 20-minute presentation, followed by 5-6 minutes of Q and A, and enough time to transition to your next session and room before the next speaker.

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## Nate Armsberry

The Centre for Public Christianity, Youth and Schools Co-ordinator

Nate Armsberry is the youth and schools co-ordinator at the Centre for Public Christianity (CPX). He has more than twenty years' experience working with teenagers as a chaplain, high school teacher, and youth pastor. His work focuses on helping Christian educators communicate faith meaningfully within contemporary adolescent culture, particularly in a networked world where identity, authority, and belief are being renegotiated. Nate develops professional learning, classroom resources, and frameworks that support teachers and chaplains to engage students in thoughtful and credible conversations about faith, culture, and identity.

### **Abstract: Cross-Cultural Communication in the Classroom: An Incarnational Approach to Faith Formation**

Adolescents are forming identity and belief within a networked cultural environment shaped by digital media and the democratisation of knowledge and authority. Drawing on insights from cultural anthropology, missiology, and adolescent identity formation, this presentation explores classroom faith conversations as a form of cross-cultural communication. It introduces cultural apologetics as a way of engaging the questions, narratives, and meaning-making frameworks that shape students' understanding of faith. Through practice-based reflection, the session considers how teachers can communicate Christian belief with cultural attentiveness and relational credibility, helping students encounter faith as intelligible and meaningful within the world they inhabit.

# Concurrent Session Speakers



## Peter Beamish

Avondale University, Director of the Christian Education Research Centre

Peter Beamish graduated from Avondale College with a BEd(Sc) in 1981 and taught in secondary schools in New South Wales for six years. He left school teaching to take up a position lecturing in the faculty of mathematics and computing at Avondale College. During this time, he completed a MEd and PhD at the University of Newcastle. He has served at Avondale as the dean of the faculty of mathematics and computing and spent 16 years as the dean of the faculty of education and science. Peter is currently the director of the Christian Education Research Centre at Avondale University.

### **Abstract (1): Should Christian Schools focus on the Character Development of Students?**

The aim of Christian schools is to holistically develop students. Christian schools achieve this by providing a comprehensive learning framework grounded in the principles and teaching of the Bible. This includes enabling students to experience physical, mental, spiritual, social, and character growth. This study focuses on the last of these and investigates the role of student character in learning, which is an area of research that is rapidly developing (Hadi et al., 2025). This study found that both the character strengths of the mind and will do impact academic achievement. Growth mindset, self-control and grit can all play a part in helping students to achieve academically in primary schools. This study supports the notion that character strengths can impact learning and consequently help students to develop these character strengths may help them to experience success.

### **Abstract (2): Do Churches on School Campuses Impact Student Spirituality?**

Jesus came so that we can live life to the full (John 10:10) and Christian education has always been concerned with holistically developing students. Increasing levels of spirituality in students has been shown to enhance their levels of wellbeing and their overall educational engagement (Klokočka, 2025). One strategy that may engage student interest in spiritual things and increase religiosity, especially church attendance, is to locate churches on school campuses. This study investigated the role of churches on school campuses and confirmed that students are interested in spiritual things and happy to put time into thinking deeply about things. This study found that the Church on Campus can play a role in engaging students but only if it evolves to meet the needs of a changing student youth demographic.

# Concurrent Session Speakers



## Daniela Brown

Bethlehem Tertiary Institute, Programme Leader

Daniela is the program leader of the graduate diploma of teaching (secondary) at Bethlehem Tertiary Institute. Her research interests (Masters and current PhD study) explore pedagogies that support the navigation of the biblical, cultural and policy environments in education. Keenly aware of the impact of teacher's dispositions towards students of diversity, she is creating a conceptual framework that can be actualised into a pedagogical resource to support the efficacy of Christian education.

### **Developing Te Taputoru Ōrite, a heuristic that supports the navigation of Gender and Sexuality discourses in Christian Initial Teacher Education.**

This presentation introduces Te Taputoru Ōrite, a heuristic that integrates theology, policy and cultural competency to support ITE students to remain hospitable to their LGBTQIA+ students.

Grounded in Micah 6:8 and informed by Freirean praxis, this presentation introduces an experimental pedagogical resource designed to foster inquiry and critical reflection. This resource aligns with New Zealand's National Education and Learning Priorities (NELP), which mandate creating safe, inclusive cultures where diversity is valued and all learners, including LGBTQIA+, neurodiverse, and culturally diverse students feel they belong. Developed through teaching in a graduate diploma of teaching program, this work offers practical strategies for reconciling tensions and reimagining classrooms as sites of kinship.



## Rhonda J. Burns

Eastern College Wantirna, Education Lecturer

Dr Rhonda J. Burns is an experienced Australian teacher who has worked in government and Christian schools. For 30 years, Rhonda has been employed in teaching positions such as, english, humanities and religious and Christian education. During this time Rhonda has also been a senior school chaplain at Strathcona Girls Grammar school. Rhonda has completed a BA (History Honours), graduate diploma of teaching, and diploma of theology. She completed her PhD at Deakin University in 2024, and her dissertation was a phenomenological study about graduated students and their Christian schooling experiences. It was titled, *What Was It Like to Go to an Australian Christian school?* Rhonda continues to be employed in several capacities: secondary teaching and lecturing and assessing at several Victorian universities. Rhonda's research interests are: spirituality in children and adults, school refusal and student voice.

### **Abstract: What Was It Like to Go to a Christian School?**

Alumni accounts reveal strong, interconnected relationships within Christian school communities, alongside hesitation to engage with those outside them. Metaphors of protection highlight how participants experienced their schooling as sheltered, shaping both understanding and identity. These reflections suggest deeply embedded Christian values that drew students toward a shared worldview, while also creating tension when encountering differing perspectives. Although not representative of all students, the findings are relevant for educators and parents, particularly regarding identity and spiritual formation. Some alumni valued the strong religious environment, while others found it challenging. Overall, many remained open to others but tended to retreat to familiar Christian communities.

# Concurrent Session Speakers



## Sam Burrows

**Christian Education National Manager of Biblical Foundations and NICE Lecturer**

Sam Burrows serves as manager of biblical foundations for Christian education at Christian Education National, working alongside educators across Australia to strengthen the theological and pedagogical life of schools. He also lectures for the National Institute for Christian Education, delivering the foundational subjects. He is particularly interested in Christology, epistemology, and the relationship between theology and pedagogy, exploring how Christian education can move beyond add-on models toward deeper participation in the reality upheld by Christ. Sam works with school leaders and teachers across diverse contexts and is currently developing research at the intersection of Christological theology and educational practice.

### **Abstract: All Things? Sacramental and Christian Knowing**

This presentation explores what it might mean to take Christ seriously as the first principle of Christian education. Rather than treating education as a neutral activity to which Christian beliefs or practices are later added, it argues that all teaching and learning already take place within a reality sustained by Christ. From this perspective, knowing is not simply the acquisition of information or skills, but a relational and formative response to a world that is already meaningful. The presentation examines how this understanding reshapes common assumptions about knowledge, formation, and educational excellence, and suggests that Christian education is best understood as participation in a sacramental and cruciform reality. Practical implications for teachers and educational leaders will be briefly sketched.



## Jared Catchpoole

**Deputy Head of Senior School, Covenant College**

Jared Catchpoole is the deputy head of senior school at Covenant College in Geelong and PhD candidate at Monash University, where he is exploring how the work of Michel Serres might help us to translate between diverse concepts of the self and provide a model that is more adequate to address complex social contexts such as education.

### **Abstract: Michel Serres and the Voyage of Learning**

This presentation explores how Christian schools can navigate the rapid changes in learning brought about by artificial intelligence and provide a biblically robust vision of what it means to be human. Drawing on the work of Michel Serres, this presentation explores how Serres' definition of learning as a "voyage" that traverses disciplines and emphasises the process of learning can help educators communicate the complexity of reality and challenge the promise of immediacy. By examining Serres' philosophy of education this presentation seeks to equip Christian educators to reflect on the purpose of education and our inherent limitations, as gifts of God's design and a reflection of our humanity.

# Concurrent Session Speakers



## Kyle Fifield

Head of Teaching and Learning, Calvin Christian School

Kyle has been in both pastoral and curriculum leadership at Calvin Christian School since 2019, as head of year, head of humanities and head of teaching and learning. Before this, Kyle worked in boarding and Christian studies leadership in New South Wales. Kyle's passions are theology and history, studies which have taken him and his family to Canada and beyond. Kyle is involved in music ministry, soccer and American football in various ways across Hobart.

### **Abstract: Closing the Pedagogy Gap**

This project derives from action research conducted at Calvin Christian School investigating a system for developing and trialing targeted Christian pedagogies. Combining insights from David Smith, NICE and the Project Zero team at Harvard, the research took place in 2023 over the course of a semester. Three staff members targeted a particular “cultural force” in their classroom they felt was malformed and introduced a pedagogical routine to re-frame that force in line with the NICE threads.



## Lindsay Fish

Bethlehem Tertiary Institute, Postgraduate Studies Programme Lead

Lindsay qualified as a secondary teacher in 2000 and has experience teaching from Years 5 to 13 with a focus on language and literacies. Following the completion of her doctoral work, Lindsay began teaching at BTI in 2021 where she now leads postgraduate studies. Her research interests include teacher mentoring and teachers' understanding of pedagogy and practice arising from their own cultural context.

### **Abstract: Wrestling Well: Engaging Critical Theory with Faith and Wisdom**

Critical theory remains contested in many Christian communities, sometimes leading to its exclusion from Christian school curricula. Yet, graduates enter universities where critical theory underpins much academic discourse. This disconnect risks leaving students unprepared and vulnerable to cognitive dissonance and crises of faith. Grounded in a discourse analysis of literature at the intersection of critical theory and Christian theology, and a survey of New Zealand Christian schools, this research developed resources to support school communities to have critical, productive, and unifying conversations. This presentation will invite participants into the ongoing conversations that navigate complexity with integrity and hope.

# Concurrent Session Speakers



## Stephen Fyson

Senior Lecturer PT/Christian Education Consultant PT, Christian Heritage College / Pacific Group of Christian Schools

Dr Stephen Fyson describes himself as a Christian psychologist by trade and a Christian teacher by heart. This had led him to study in psychology, theology and education. He has worked in youth ministry, addictions counselling, and health service delivery and development. Since moving into Christian schooling (decades ago), he has worked as teacher, counsellor, and principal. He is now mainly involved in teaching teachers in many different formats and contexts.

### **Abstract: On Emotions — in the Word and in our Teaching World**

What do you mean when you use the word "emotions" in your teaching? For example, what does "socio-emotional learning" mean in light of what the Bible teaches us about life before God? This seminar will briefly explore this concept of emotions historically, in order to better understand what the Bible teaches us about this part of life, in order to reflect on possible implications for our teaching as Christians.



## Rebecca Gibson

Laidlaw College, Education Development Lead

Rebecca is a lecturer and researcher at Laidlaw College, New Zealand. Her diverse experience in education includes roles as a teacher, senior leader, consultant, research and policy advisor to a member of parliament, and teacher educator.

As a PhD candidate at Australian Catholic University, Rebecca specialises in interdisciplinary research connecting philosophy, education, and theology. She is particularly passionate about exploring fundamental questions regarding the purpose and practice of education and developing teachers who think critically and wisely about their vocation.

### **Abstract: Reimagining Education: A critical realist critique and deepening of critical pedagogy**

This presentation, drawn from my ongoing PhD research, examines critical pedagogy—the influential approach to teaching that seeks to empower students, challenge injustice, and inspire transformative action. While critical pedagogy has shaped much of contemporary education, it shows limitations when viewed against today's complex social, political, and technological landscape. Using a structured philosophical lens (critical realism), the research identifies key weaknesses and strengthens the approach to make it more philosophically robust and practically useful. The result is a refreshed framework with implications for curriculum, classroom practice, teacher preparation, school leadership, and policy, thus offering Christian educators tools to navigate cultural currents while fostering education that is hopeful, truthful, and humanising.

# Concurrent Session Speakers



## Yvonne Harvey

Heathdale Christian College, Principal

Yvonne Harvey is the primary principal at Heathdale Christian College, leading a vibrant Kinder–Year 6 community grounded in Christ-centred education. Yvonne has more than 30 years’ experience across the UK and Australia in state and independent schools. She is known for her relational leadership, strategic clarity, and deep commitment to nurturing students and staff. Yvonne is currently completing her NICE studies, refining her expertise in educational leadership and biblical formation. She is passionate about building thriving, gospel-shaped school cultures where every child is known, supported, and encouraged in God’s purposes for their life.

### **Abstract: Classroom Devotions in a Christian School—Forming Teacher Practice**

This study explores how teachers interpret, design, and lead devotions, and how leadership can support practices that are both biblically faithful and pedagogically purposeful. Focusing on teacher perceptions, it identifies gaps in understanding, along with professional learning and resourcing needs. Using qualitative methods, including questionnaires and interviews, the research gathers insights into current practices, challenges, and opportunities at Heathdale Christian College. The findings aim to inform recommendations that strengthen devotional practice, build teacher confidence and biblical literacy, and ensure devotions remain a vital, gospel-centred element of Christian education.



## Vladka Henley

Avondale University, Lecturer in the School of Education and Science

Dr Vladka Henley is a lecturer in the school of education and science at Avondale University with a strong foundation in secondary teaching, specialising in modern history. Vladka is dedicated to preparing future educators with critical thinking skills, historical awareness, and a reflective approach to teaching. Her pedagogical interests include innovative classroom teaching practices that enhance student engagement. Her current research focuses on the practical usefulness of university lectures in special needs, Indigenous education and student diversity based on graduate teacher feedback. These insights can inform and strengthen pedagogical practice in initial teacher education at the university level. Other current research explores faith experiences under European communism during the Cold War era.

### **Abstract: An Exploration into the Factors that Influence Parents when Choosing a Faith-based School for their Children: An Australian Faith-based School System Case Study.**

This study examined why parents choose Australian faith-based schools, particularly as many families do not share the school’s faith tradition or identify with any faith. Using a qualitative approach, interviews with twenty-one parents across four schools revealed that decisions were shaped by multiple factors. Key influences included a desire for values-based education, strong support for student wellbeing, and opportunities to enhance academic potential. The findings suggest that faith identity is not the primary driver for many families. These insights have important implications for policy and marketing, especially in improving enrolments and retention, and may be relevant to other faith-based school systems across Australia.

# Concurrent Session Speakers



## Timothy Hewitt

Broughton Anglican College, Principal

Timothy Hewitt is principal of Broughton Anglican College in New South Wales and has served in Christian education for over two decades across both CEN and Anglican school contexts. A reformed evangelical educator, Tim is committed to integrating theological conviction with evidence-informed practice. His research explores how Christian schools translate doctrinal foundations into teaching and learning frameworks that faithfully shape students' hearts and minds under the Lordship of Christ.

**Abstract: How do the Theological Foundations of Christian Education National (CEN) and Anglican Schools in Australia Influence their Teaching and Learning Curriculum and Documentation?**

This presentation explores how theological foundations shape teaching and learning in Australian Christian schooling. Focusing on Christian Education National (CEN) and Anglican schools in the Sydney Diocese, it examines how shared Reformed evangelical convictions are expressed through curriculum and pedagogy. While both affirm the authority of Scripture and the Lordship of Christ, they differ in ecclesiological emphasis and educational priorities. Through comparative document analysis, the study highlights key differences, strengths, and potential risks, offering practical insights for educators seeking to align curriculum and classroom practice with theological convictions in formative education.



## Elizabeth T. Hutchison

St Philip's Christian Education, Lead Specialist, Higher Education Development and Research

Elizabeth values Christian education, teaching and learning, mentoring, and curriculum development and has been a teacher and leader in Christian education since 1990. Her experiences in Christian education include employment in K-12 schools in NSW, Queensland, and Hong Kong, and teaching on M. V. Doulos, working in teacher education, participating in school accreditations in Asia, and sessional lecturing at Morling in MEd (Leadership). Elizabeth enjoys fine-tuning systems, supporting others, and nurturing growth in individuals and organisations. Elizabeth is in the final stages of her doctoral research which explores the leadership landscape relating to women in Christian schools globally.

**Abstract: Mentor Formation: Empowering Mentors to Shape Trainee Teachers**

This presentation explores the development and early impact of a mentor formation framework within the St Philip's Teaching School model, grounded in a biblical worldview. Addressing the need to better equip mentors for initial teacher education, the framework integrates professional competence with spiritual formation, viewing mentoring as a vocation shaping identity, character, and purpose. Centred on three dimensions—mentor as person, mentor, and educator—it uses differentiated learning and reflective, data-informed practices. The session highlights how this approach equips mentors holistically and supports the growth of Christ-centred mentoring communities.

# Concurrent Session Speakers



## Miriam Lili

National Institute for Christian Education, Senior Lecturer

Dr Miriam Lili is a Christian wife, mother, teacher, and a child of God! She believes that a biblical worldview provides the most satisfactory and empowering answers to life's questions. Miriam is currently teaching secondary science and maths in a Christian school in Queensland. Miriam has taught in Christian schools in the Northern Territory, South Australia, and New South Wales. She completed her masters of education with the National Institute for Christian Education (NICE) and her PhD with the University of New England. Miriam enjoys her family, thrives on variety, and loves thinking outside the box.

### **Abstract: Schemas for Straddling STEAM: Diagrammatic Representations of Complex Cross-Disciplinary Research**

After making a decision to cut 40 000 words to bring my thesis back within the word limit for a PhD, it was clear that my STEAM project was both colossal and complex. A kind critical friend provided a fresh voice in between the tug of war between the two STEAM disciplines—mathematics and drama—that were the foci of this project. His suggestion, during the proofreading process, was that it might help to include a series of diagrams to represent the various sections of the complex approach and the connections between them. Once applied, it was found that this schema strategy brought cohesion and clarity to the thesis and to my thinking.



## Emily Lockhart

Virtue Community, Director

Emily Lockhart brings over 20 years of experience in health education in Christian schools. With a rich background in addressing sensitive and challenging subjects, Emily completed a doctoral study focusing on the interplay between a teacher's worldview and the delivery of health education in Western Australia. Her passion for high-quality education and commitment to supporting Christian teachers inspired the creation of her company, Virtue Community. Alongside being the director of Virtue Community, Emily also works as a lecturer at Curtin University in Perth.

### **Abstract: A Case Study of Virtues-Based Education in a Christian School**

This presentation examines how virtues-based education can support the spiritual, moral, and academic formation of students in Christian schools. Drawing on an exploratory case study in a Western Australian context, it follows a teacher implementing a virtues-based program, using reflective journaling and interviews. The findings show how intentionally embedding Christian virtues strengthened the teacher's practice and confidence, particularly in addressing sensitive content. The session explores implications for character formation, professional learning, and Christian education, inviting reflection on how research can better equip teachers to nurture wisdom, discernment, and faithful living in young people.

# Concurrent Session Speakers



## Paul Matthews

**Calvin Christian School, Head of Humanities and Social Sciences and Christian Studies**

Paul Matthews is a third-generation educator on a mission to bless others through education. He serves as the head of history and Christian studies at Calvin Christian School in Tasmania, Australia, and is also a fellow at Baylor University. When he is not teaching, Paul works with schools and organisations across Australia and North America, helping leaders and teachers navigate AI wisely through training, speaking, and practical support. He has written several books, including *A Time to Lead* and *Artificial Intelligence, Real Literacy*. Paul and his wife, Elbie, are blessed to have three sons, Moses, Solomon, and Phineas, with another child due in mid-2026.

### **Abstract: Faithful Assessment: A Christian Vision for Assessment in a World with Artificial Intelligence**

Artificial Intelligence has fundamentally changed assessment in schools. As a secondary teacher, I have seen these changes first hand. Each year more students are using generative tools, and many assessment tasks no longer give us assurance of learning. This presentation introduces the concept of Faithful Assessment, a Christian vision for assessment in a world with AI. The aim is to help educators design rich tasks that give a faithful picture of what students know, can do, and are becoming; we seek assurance of learning and formation, not just completion. I will share classroom examples, a practical redesign framework, and clear language for setting AI expectations.



## Dean McDonald

**National Institute for Christian Education, Adjunct Lecturer**

Dean is an educator and ordained minister living on the Yorke Peninsula, South Australia, with his wife Jess and four sons. As a primary school teacher, his faith and educational practice was profoundly shaped by living alongside First Nations people in remote communities, especially his time at Mäpuru Christian School. This experience continues to inform Dean's research in the Hebrew Bible, with a particular focus on intercultural hermeneutics and Bible translation.

### **Abstract: Melchizedek: A Surprising Stranger**

How do we, as Christian educators, dialogue with the diverse cultural communities in our social settings, and with First Nations peoples? This presentation discusses the story of Abram and Melchizedek found in Genesis 14:17-24. In this reading we see that the early hearers of the Genesis text also struggled with how they were to relate to their foreign neighbours, and what knowledge of God they may have had. Attention to this social context reveals that Melchizedek is a surprising stranger, an encouragement to us to listen to voices different from our own and bring them into our classrooms.

# Concurrent Session Speakers



## Rebecca Moffat

**Alphacrucis University College, Lecturer and Program Director Bachelor of Early Childhood and Primary Education**

Rebecca Moffat is a lecturer and program director in teacher education at Alphacrucis University College and a doctor of education candidate at Queensland University of Technology. Her research investigates how early-career teachers in diverse educational settings interpret trauma-aware professional learning and how this shapes their developing professional identity, beliefs, and classroom practice. With a focus on the relational, emotional, and cognitive demands placed on beginning teachers, her work examines how teachers negotiate tensions between policy expectations, behaviour support, and the realities of trauma-impacted classrooms. Rebecca's broader professional interests include teacher wellbeing, identity formation, and the preparation of educators for contemporary schooling contexts characterised by complexity, diversity, and the increasing need for trauma-aware approaches.

**Abstract: Renewing the Teacher: Trauma-Aware Formation, Professional Identity, and the Christian Imagination in Contemporary Schooling**

This presentation introduces an emerging doctoral study investigating how early-career teachers across diverse schooling sectors encounter and make sense of trauma-aware professional learning. While trauma-aware education continues to grow in policy and practice, little is known about how beginning teachers interpret this learning, negotiate its emotional and relational demands, or integrate it into their developing professional identity. This research explores the meaning-making processes teachers engage in as they confront tensions between mandated expectations, lived classroom realities, and their own beliefs about behaviour, care, and practice. By focusing on the interpretive experiences of teachers rather than on program outcomes, this study offers a fresh perspective on how trauma-aware approaches shape teacher identity, mindset, and professional presence in contemporary schooling.



## Ben Myers

**Alphacrucis University College, Deputy Vice President in Research**

Ben Myers is professor of theology and literature and deputy vice president (research) at Alphacrucis University College, where he leads research strategy and partnerships. He has held roles at University of Queensland, Charles Sturt University, and Christian Heritage College, and undertaken fellowships at Fuller Theological Seminary and the Center of Theological Inquiry. Specialising in theology and literature, his research focuses on seventeenth-century texts and modern theology, with publications including studies on Rowan Williams.

**Abstract: Wisdom in Word and Image: Picture Book Biographies of Dietrich Bonhoeffer (with Danielle Terceiro)**

This presentation examines two picture book biographies of Dietrich Bonhoeffer. Dietrich Bonhoeffer's Christian faith motivated him to resist the Nazi regime in World War II Germany. The presentation will examine the visual language used in these picture books, and the implications of presenting Bonhoeffer's life in a multimodal, narrative medium.

How can classroom teachers facilitate critical thinking and encourage discernment for their students as they engage with these picture book biographies?

# Concurrent Session Speakers



## Cassandra Pendlebury

**Alphacrucis University College, Director of Post-Graduate Studies and Director of Partnerships**

Cass Pendlebury has been a Christian educator and leader for over 20 years. She achieved her BA Dip Ed from Macquarie University in 1984 and her master of leadership and management in education from the University of Newcastle in 2004. Cass is currently completing a PhD at Avondale University. She is director of postgraduate studies and teaching school partnerships, having previously been employed as the NSW executive officer for Christian Schools Australia.

### **Abstract: NECSTEP Phase 2 and Framework for Mentoring (with Emily Shea)**

The aim of this presentation is to present an overview of the National Embedded Cross-Sector Teacher Education Pilot (NECSTEP) project including the outcomes of Phase 2 and the development of the School Embedded Teacher Support (SETS) Framework. This research has contributed to the wider education landscape by identifying sustained engagement in schools as the key factor for readiness, as identified by trainee teachers in school-embedded models nationally.

This presentation will share the co-designed framework and allow participants to trial the framework using crafted scenarios. The focus is on how the framework is being developed and refined to meet context-specific needs within a sustained, school-embedded model.



## Rachel Pickering

**Educator and Formation Practitioner**

Rachel is a Christian educator, program developer, and museum studies postgraduate who works at the intersection of theology, education, and cultural heritage. She brings over a decade of experience building programs, shaping school culture, and embedding learning and behaviour frameworks grounded in theological vision across both whole-school strategy and classroom design. Her work creates learning that is experiential, reflective, and rooted in encounter with God, where attention, imagination, and ethical inquiry shape formation. Outside school, she is an artist and self-described treasure hunter—finding overlooked objects in op shops, fossicking for sapphires, or tending a greenhouse. Currently based in Jervis Bay, she holds that what we attend to is never neutral—that life with God is not an addition, but shapes how we live and learn.

### **Abstract: Dwelling Before Doing: Attention, Beauty, and Inquiry in Christian Formation**

Christian educators often carry an unspoken burden, questioning whether they are doing enough or if the future of Christian education rests on them. This session reframes that by returning to Psalm 27:4, presenting God as the foundation, not an addition, to educational work. Formation begins with dwelling in God, gazing on His beauty, and then inquiring. From this centre, coherence emerges across mission, curriculum, and practice. Through a practical reframing model and examples, participants will see how this shift shapes all aspects of school life, replacing anxiety with the assurance that God, not human effort, is sufficient.

# Concurrent Session Speakers



## Chris Rayner

National Institute for Christian Education, Senior Lecturer

Chris is a senior lecturer at the National Institute for Christian Education and honorary associate at Alphacrucis University College. He has a particular interest in mentoring, coaching, and spiritual formation. For just over 11 years (2010-2022), Chris worked as a research academic and teacher educator for the University of Tasmania, with a focus on inclusive education. From 2022 to 2025, he served Christian Schools Tasmania as teacher development and innovation coordinator and Director of the Tasmanian CEN Teaching Hub.

**Abstract: Wisdom for Mentoring in Christian Schools: Findings from a School-embedded Model of Initial Teacher Education (with Sue Westraad and Emily Shea)**

Mentoring is a relationship in which a more experienced educator draws on their wisdom and experience to enrich the learning and life journey of a less experienced educator. This presentation reports on a study investigating mentoring in the Teaching School Hub model, which embeds a professional experience placement in one school throughout the program. The findings reveal that mentoring unfolds through reciprocal learning, contextualised guidance, and integration into everyday school practice. Enabling factors include institutional recognition of mentoring, alignment of mentor expertise with mentee needs, and opportunities for sustained interaction. We explore the potential of effective mentoring and coaching in ongoing Christian teacher formation and offer individual, school, and system-level recommendations.



## Michael Street

National Institute for Christian Education, Adjunct Lecturer

Michael Street is a history teacher serving as dean of academic studies at Oxford Falls Grammar School. He is also an adjunct lecturer at the National Institute for Christian Education and a PhD candidate in the school of education at Macquarie University. His doctoral research explores how the cultural climate of Australian Christian schools interacts with teacher self-efficacy and collective teacher efficacy. In early 2027, Michael will complete his PhD and publish a book about the history of apartheid in South Africa, for use in the NSW modern history course.

**Abstract: School Climate and its Interactions with Teacher Self-Efficacy and Collective Teacher Efficacy in Australian Christian Schools**

Teaching is a demanding job. Teaching in Christian schools is even more demanding. To what extent do Christian school teachers feel capable in this environment? What organisational and cultural climate factors support or undermine this sense of capability? Answering these questions is crucial for Australian Christian schooling leaders aiming to develop teaching communities that are capable, sustainable, mission-aligned, and healthy. In response, this presentation shares findings from an explanatory sequential mixed-methods PhD study examining the relationship between school climate, teacher self-efficacy, and collective teacher efficacy in Australian Christian schools. Throughout the presentation, we will identify and explore the cultural factors that influence individual and collective teacher capability in the classroom, as well as the role that leadership plays in shaping these factors. Finally, a research agenda for potential inquiries into the social cognition of teachers in Australian Christian Schools will be articulated.

# Concurrent Session Speakers



## Emily Shea

Alphacrucis University College, PhD Candidate

Emily Shea is the teacher training hub director with Northern Territory Christian Schools. She is completing a PhD with Alphacrucis University College exploring the induction practices of Christian schools in Australia, considering how they support and shape Christian teacher development. Emily lectures for both the National Institute for Christian Education and the Alphacrucis University College programs.

**Abstract (1): Wisdom for mentoring in Christian schools: Findings from a school-embedded model of initial teacher education (with Sue Westraad and Chris Rayner)**

Mentoring is a relationship in which a more experienced educator draws on their wisdom and experience to enrich the learning and life journey of a less experienced educator. This presentation reports on a study investigating mentoring in the Teaching School Hub model, which embeds a professional experience placement in one school throughout the program. The findings reveal that mentoring unfolds through reciprocal learning, contextualised guidance, and integration into everyday school practice. Enabling factors include institutional recognition of mentoring, alignment of mentor expertise with mentee needs, and opportunities for sustained interaction. We explore the potential of effective mentoring and coaching in ongoing Christian teacher formation and offer individual, school, and system-level recommendations.

**Abstract (2): NECSTEP Phase 2 and Framework for Mentoring (with Cassandra Pendlebury)**

The aim of this presentation is to present an overview of the National Embedded Cross-Sector Teacher Education Pilot (NECSTEP) project including the outcomes of Phase 2 and the development of the School Embedded Teacher Support (SETS) Framework. This research has contributed to the wider education landscape by identifying sustained engagement in schools as the key factor for readiness, as identified by trainee teachers in school-embedded models nationally. This presentation will share the co-designed framework and allow participants to trial the framework using crafted scenarios. The focus is on how the framework is being developed and refined to meet context-specific needs within a sustained, school-embedded model.

**Abstract (3): Enhancing Comprehensive Induction in Christian Schools.**

This presentation summarises the initial findings in the literature exploring comprehensive induction practices of Christian schools and how they support and shape Christian teacher development. Drawn from the researcher's confirmation of candidature presentation, this seminar will outline what research has been conducted into such examples of induction both in Australia and internationally and will point to the gap in which the researcher intends to commit her PhD research.

This research finds significance in the current dearth of research in this space both in Christian schools and in Australia. I hope that this presentation will encourage those who are seeking to support early career teachers in Christian schools and to engage with some questions and thoughts from the attendees.

# Concurrent Session Speakers



## Danielle Terceiro

Mary Andrews College, Honorary Fellow

Danielle Terceiro is employed as a research fellow at the Centre for Public Christianity in Australia. In 2025 she completed a fellowship with Anglican Deaconess Ministries and is writing a book on the holy fool in the 21st century. Danielle is completing a PhD through Alphacrucis University College, examining how history is retold for a young audience in picture books and graphic novels.

**Abstract: Wisdom in word and image: Picture book biographies of Dietrich Bonhoeffer (with Ben Myers)**

This presentation examines two picture book biographies of Dietrich Bonhoeffer. Dietrich Bonhoeffer's Christian faith motivated him to resist the Nazi regime in World War II Germany. The presentation will examine the visual language used in these picture books, and the implications of presenting Bonhoeffer's life in a multimodal, narrative medium.

How can classroom teachers facilitate critical thinking and encourage discernment for their students as they engage with these picture book biographies?



## Sam Waldron

Bayside Christian College Teacher and Christian Education National Young Christian Thinkers Symposium Convener

Sam is a VCE literature and history teacher (of Christ) at Bayside Christian College, a postgraduate student at Trinity College Theological School and convener of the CEN Young Christian Thinkers Symposium. While his interests range from repetition to theological ethics to woodchopping, his current research focuses on the theology of the self-in-relation-to-others in the Pauline literary corpus. Sam is passionate about expanding the presence of the scriptures in classrooms and beyond.

**Abstract: "Become imitators of me, just as I am of Christ" (1 Cor 11:1): The Epistle to Philemon and the (Pauline?) Christian Classroom**

The aim of this presentation is to combine recent scholarship on Pauline anthropology and epistolography with original research and to its potential in settings within Christian education. The study will explore the potential of constructing student learning founded upon the form and content of scripture, and its notions of the "self." The project seeks to examine Philemon as an example of Pauline "epistolary ethics"—where literary art, paraenesis and apostolic theology are indistinguishable. By doing so, we hope to begin to answer two questions: How might scholarship on Paul's self-referentiality influence our understanding of the self in the context of Christian schools; and what prevents us from adopting New Testament texts as "types" for teaching in Christian schools?

# Concurrent Session Speakers



## Susan Westraad

**Associate Professor and Head of School of Education, Alphacrucis University College**

Sue is the head of school of education at Alphacrucis University College. Previously she worked as a program director with General Motors where she developed her interest in piloting and documenting education models to address key education challenges. She was awarded the American Chamber of Commerce Star of Stars award for one of the models. Sue has been a member of national curriculum writing panels and written textbooks. Her current research focuses on the teaching school hub model, mentoring and coaching and teaching from a biblically informed pedagogical and worldview perspective.

**Abstract: Wisdom for Mentoring in Christian Schools: Findings from a School-embedded Model of Initial Teacher Education  
(with Chris Rayner and Emily Shea)**

Mentoring is a relationship in which a more experienced educator draws on their wisdom and experience to enrich the learning and life journey of a less experienced educator. This presentation reports on a study investigating mentoring in the Teaching School Hub model, which embeds a professional experience placement in one school throughout the program. The findings reveal that mentoring unfolds through reciprocal learning, contextualised guidance, and integration into everyday school practice. Enabling factors include institutional recognition of mentoring, alignment of mentor expertise with mentee needs, and opportunities for sustained interaction. We explore the potential of effective mentoring and coaching in ongoing Christian teacher formation and offer individual, school, and system-level recommendations.

# FAQs



## **What is included in my registration fee ?**

If you have registered to be at the symposium in person, your registration includes a full-day experience at the symposium. It includes access to the keynote and plenary sessions and any breakout sessions you choose to attend (see program schedules). Morning tea, lunch, and afternoon tea are available at the times indicated on the program. These breaks are designed to give you time to chat with speakers, talk about your own interests and research, and get to know someone new.

If you have joined us online, you will have access to the plenary sessions and any breakout sessions streamed from the chapel during the day.

## **Will the catering be suitable for my dietary needs?**

Yes. Your registration forms provided a chance to indicate your dietary needs, but if these have changed for you in the meantime or you did not indicate this at the time, please see one of the NICE staff (look for the name tags).

## **How long are the presentations?**

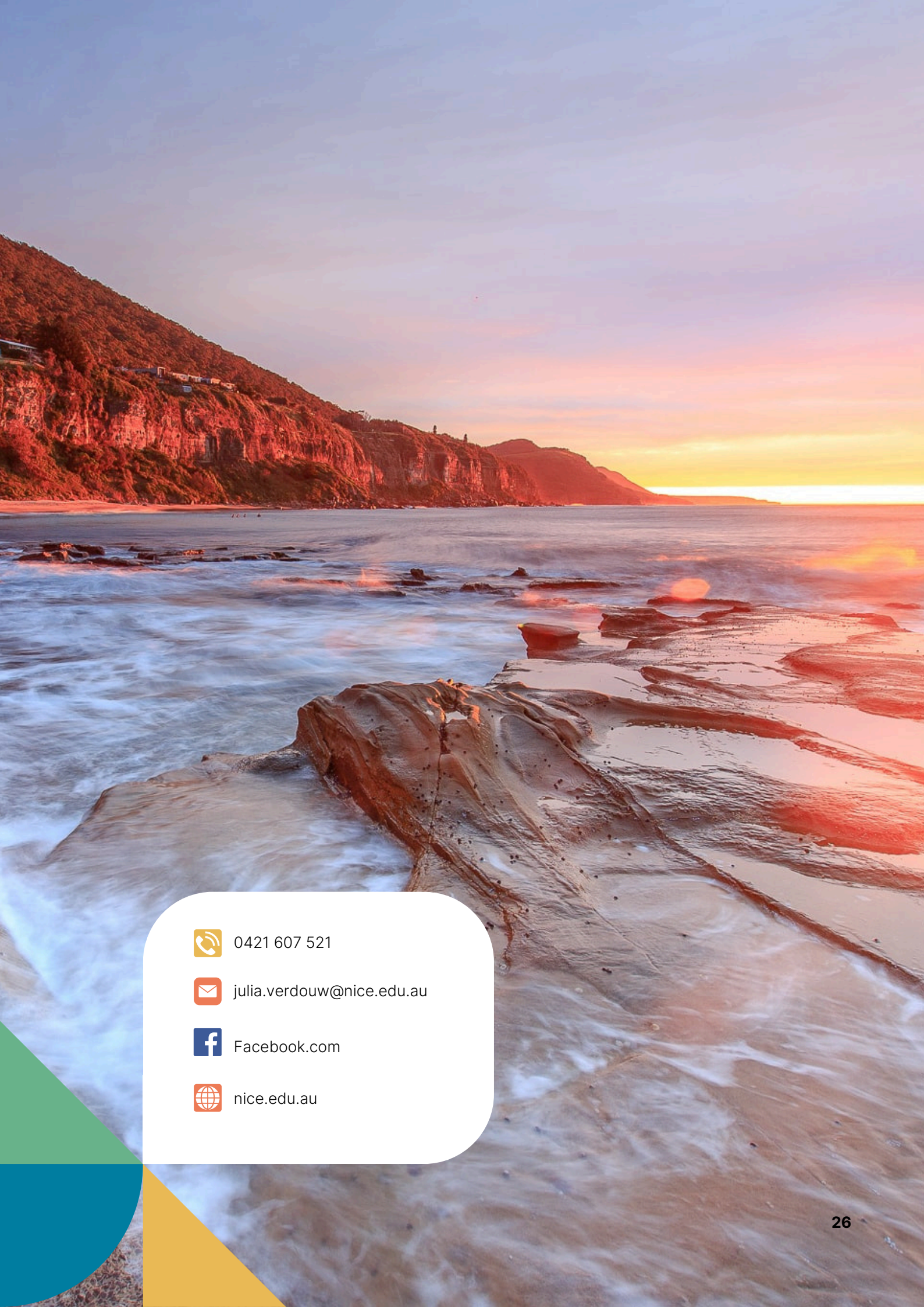
Keynote sessions are 45 minutes each. There are two keynote sessions across the day, and one plenary (facilitated discussion) session. The breakout speaker sessions include concurrent sessions across three rooms (the Chapel, G-02, G-04 and G-07). Based on the program abstracts, you will choose which presentations you wish to attend. Each session will include a 20-minute presentation, followed by 5-6 minutes of Q and A, and enough time to transit to your next session and room before the next speaker.


## **Will presentations be available online after the conference?**

No. To access presentation material, please approach the individual speakers.

## **Who can I contact for further information or guidance?**

There will be several National Institute staff available to talk to during the conference. Staff will be wearing NICE name tags to identify them. The breakout session chairpersons are also a good contact point. Please don't hesitate to come and speak with us throughout the day if you need assistance with anything.



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