

Mentoring the mentors: quality assurance or professional development?

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Introduction

Although the relationship between schools and ITT providers in England has focussed for the last 15 years on mentoring and related skills, there has been an increasing emphasis on the development of the role of the ITT co-ordinator who is now expected to manage school based ITT in increasingly complex partnerships.

There appears to be a lack of relevant and up-to-date research and professional literature in this field. This project sought to explore current practice in primary and secondary schools with a view to providing an increased understanding of the issues. This was done through a review of the relevant literature, an analysis of the documentation produced by local Higher Education Institutions [HEIs], through interviews with a number of co-ordinators and an extensive questionnaire to a large sample of schools across nine Local Education Authorities [LEAs] within SE1.

This paper contextualises the issue through the literature, and reports part of this research, (drawing on data from HEI documentation and interviews with coordinators). It examines a range of factors including the personal profile of the ITT co-ordinator, the identification of key issues in relation to the role, and perceptions of the changing nature of this role in the light of increasingly complex partnerships.

A review of the literature related to the role of the ITT co-ordinator in schools

Background

The changes to Initial Teacher Training (ITT) in England brought about by the requirements of government circulars 9/92 (DfE 1992) and 14/93 (DfE 1993) signalled a new era in terms of the relationship between Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) and schools. Central to these changes was the government's expectation that "partner schools and HEIs will exercise a joint responsibility for the planning and management of courses and the selection, training and assessment of students" (DfE 1992, paragraph 14). Prior to this the need for change had also been identified in some quarters both through research into the system as it then existed and from the experience of actually working within that system, with the conclusion that what was being taught in HEIs needed to be linked more closely with school-based practice and should be seen to have a greater relevance. The move towards a different conceptualisation of the relationship between the HEI and schools was exemplified most notably in the development of the Oxford Internship Scheme (Benton, 1990) which had been introduced in order to address two of the key problems identified through research into ITT – namely the:

“disconnectedness of university-based studies from student teachers’ work in schools” and “the poor condition of the school teacher’s learning in school” (McIntyre, 1997).

Central to the development of this innovative model for school-based teacher education was the Professional Tutor whose role and responsibilities were clearly defined (Hagger et al. 1994).

The above government circulars not only stated the requirement for all HEIs to have a closer relationship with schools but also defined, more or less, what the nature of this new relationship would be in terms of the role and functions of each of the partners. Furlong et al. (2000) describe this as ‘complementary partnership’ in that:

“(t)he school and the university or college are seen as having separate and complementary responsibilities but there is no systematic attempt to bring these two dimensions into dialogue” (Furlong et al. 2000).

Their findings, however, from the Modes of Teacher Education (MOTE) project indicated that neither this model of ‘complementary partnership’ (as envisaged by the government) nor what they describe as ‘collaborative partnership’ (such as the Oxford Internship Scheme) were to be found in the majority of cases. Rather they identified what they call the ‘HEI-led model’ of partnership where it is the HEI that essentially defines the nature of student learning in schools and where the school delivers the learning opportunities.

Detailed accounts of how individual HEIs responded to the challenges of 9/92 and 14/93 are well-documented (for example, Everton and White 1992; Griffiths and Owen (Eds) 1995; McIntyre (ed) 1997; Burton, 1998) but one key feature of all HEI / school partnerships is the development of the roles of both mentor and ITT co-ordinator in the schools in question. Various models of mentoring have been put forward (see McIntyre et al. 1993; Furlong and Maynard 1995; Tomlinson 1995; McIntyre and Hagger 1996; Brooks and Sikes 1997) covering practice in both primary and secondary schools where there may be significant differences – in secondary schools the mentor is seen almost exclusively as being a subject specialist whereas in primary schools it is not unusual for the mentor to play a dual role – co-ordinating the ITT work in the school overall and supporting the learning of the individual trainee(s) (Edwards and Collison 1996). This may be further complicated by the fact that the mentor may not necessarily be the class teacher with whom the trainee is working on a day to day basis. The variety in terms of role is reflected in a variety of titles for individuals varying out these functions - Furlong et al. (1997) talk about a ‘senior mentor’ (the person with overall co-ordinating responsibilities) and the ‘class mentor’ (the teacher whose focus is on the trainee’s learning on a day to day basis). Moyle et al. (1998) report the low proportion of primary schools in their survey that had ‘mentoring co-ordinators’ and that even when such a role existed the function seemed to be solely the allocation of trainee teachers to specific classes and then the allocation of mentors to these trainees. Interestingly, where headteachers claimed to act as the co-ordinator,

“none of the mentors or new entrants interviewed was able to say how this role was fulfilled” (Moyes et al 1998).

In secondary schools the range of titles associated with such a post can be wide ranging (Brooks and Sikes, 1997) and accounts of differing schemes refer to, amongst others, professional tutor, professional mentor, ITT co-ordinator, ITT manager, and training manager. Roles within the school are also not always limited to ITT. Many school-based co-ordinators may also have other staff development responsibilities such as the induction of newly qualified teachers (NQTs), which maybe require a similar range of skills and understanding as well as qualities and characteristics (Teacher Training Agency, 2001). In addition the development of alternative routes into teaching such as the Graduate Teacher Programme (GTP), schemes offering qualifications through School Centred Initial Teacher Training (SCITT) providers, the designation of certain schools as Training Schools etc. have all led to schools re-conceptualising the role of staff involved in these activities and in many cases expanding the role of those co-ordinating such work.

In spite of the enormous amount that has been written about mentoring in ITT, both in this country and across the world, much less focus has been placed on the role of the ITT co-ordinator in schools, in spite of the fact that the person fulfilling this role is key to the success of any given programme. Whilst the role is alluded to in much of the professional literature related to partnership in ITT and to mentoring in particular (see above), and whilst there is

some guidance as to the nature of the role in some published handbooks (for example, McIntyre et al. 1994) there appears to be little empirical work carried out in this area.

Role of the ITT co-ordinator

The principal role of the ITT co-ordinator can be seen to fall broadly into four distinct areas – what might be referred to as managerial, pedagogical, evaluative and pastoral.

In terms of the managerial aspects of the work, co-ordinators generally oversee the school experience of individual trainees or groups of trainees, either from one provider or from more than one provider, and are responsible for liaising with the HEI(s), inducting the trainees into the school as a whole and into its systems, co-ordinating the school-based seminars, liaising with the school's senior management team, producing the schools' ITT policy etc. (Brooks and Sikes, 1997; Furlong et al. 1997; McIntyre et al., 1994; Windsor 1995). In primary schools this managerial role may fall to the mentor or, in larger schools, there may be a delineation of roles with the 'senior mentor' planning and co-ordinating the trainee teacher's work within the school and the 'class mentor' taking responsibility for the trainee's learning (Furlong et al. 1997). In such cases the 'senior mentor's' role is more one of quality assurance (i.e. ensuring that assessments are carried out at the appropriate times, monitoring and evaluating the quality of the school's overall provision etc.) but he/she would also run seminars focused on whole school issues so does have some direct involvement in the trainee's learning.

The responsibility for the trainee teachers' learning within the school is, in fact, a key feature of the ITT co-ordinator's role and there are similarities in the way in which this is executed from school to school. In most ITT partnerships the school-based ITT co-ordinator is responsible for the organisation of a seminar programme that serves as an induction to the school for the trainees and goes on to address a number of whole school issues. McIntyre et al. (1994) highlight however the dangers inherent in an approach which only focuses on the way that things are done in the school in question. Whilst it is tempting to adopt such an approach (and since it is one which often suits the trainees own preferences and is relatively easy to manage and deliver) it does not address the question as to why things are done in particular ways which leads on "to questions about alternative practices and their relative merits, and to issues about the criteria being used, the evidence available, and the interests being served.." (ibid). They go on to suggest that the co-ordinator should follow a number of basic principles when putting together a school programme, these being:

- Progression
- Responsiveness
- Negotiation
- Depth and breadth
- Coherence
- Making the most of different perspectives and approaches (McIntyre et al. (1994))

In relation to the final principle it is suggested that the school programme should encourage trainee teachers to look at any differences and tensions that emerge in a constructive way and to recognise that these tensions are the result of different perspectives, each of which may be valuable. The co-ordinator's role is to foster a dialectic process whereby trainee teachers can understand each of the possibly conflicting perspectives and then synthesise the ideas from each in order to develop their own understanding and practice. The authors give examples of what some of these differences and tensions might be and summarise them as differences between the ideal and the practical; between the general and the particular; between the theoretically justified and the intuitively right (ibid).

Another key aspect of the role of the ITT co-ordinator is in relation to assessment. Within the competency based framework of the Standards for the Award of Qualified Teacher Status (TTA 2002) there are clearly some aspects of professional practice, such as those relating to professional values that are not assessed solely through performance in the classroom. Many authors (e.g. Tomlinson 1995; Bourne and Leach 1995; Brooks and Sikes, 1997) acknowledge the contribution that the ITT co-ordinator makes in terms of assessing the competences of trainee teachers. This can be done in two ways – either personally assessing those competences that relate to the wider professional values and practice as demonstrated during the time that the trainee spends in the school, or by contributing to and moderating the assessments made by other colleagues in the school.

The pastoral contribution that school co-ordinators can make is alluded to occasionally in relation to overseeing the general well-being of the trainee teacher in the school (Edwards and Collison 1996; Pell, 1997) but little mention is made of any wider pastoral involvement with trainee teachers.

When considering the recruitment of ITT co-ordinators to the post, Glover and Mardle (1996), in their survey of a number of secondary schools in one HEI partnership, found that professional mentors (the term used in these schools) had been appointed either by designation by the headteacher or appointed following an internal advertisement or an approach made to a suitable member of staff. In terms of the way in which ITT policy was developed in these schools the authors found a variety of practice and were able to identify three models. Firstly, in two of the twenty schools in their survey, the headteacher decided the policy and then delegated responsibility for the delivery of it to the professional mentor; secondly, in a further nine schools the senior management team was responsible for the policy; and finally, in the remaining schools, the professional mentor had sole responsibility for the policy and for its implementation. Glover and Mardle examine the issues inherent in each of these three models and conclude that the least constraining is that in which the professional mentor takes responsibility for developing and implementing the policy but where this is done in close consultation with the school's leadership team.

Qualities and characteristics

Given the wide-ranging nature of the role of the ITT co-ordinator it is clear that certain qualities and characteristics are identified as being desirable in order for the duties and responsibilities to be carried out efficiently and effectively. Furlong et al. (1997) suggest that status is important, particularly if the post is not occupied by a member of the schools' senior management team since a proportion of the work involves supporting and guiding other colleagues in the school, as well as liaising with the senior management team in relation to the development of ITT policy within the school. Alongside the need for status they also identify the ability to act with sensitivity towards adult learners, the confidence and strength to be able to insist that school-based programmes are followed and the need to be 'open-minded and committed to developing ... professional knowledge and skills' (Furlong et al. 1997).

Brooks and Sikes (1997) also identify the need for broad experience and being open to ideas as well as the ability to analyse and reflect in relation to examining both ones own practice and that of others. The capacity to generate new ideas and the ability to explore these in the school context is similarly important (Windsor, 1995) whilst McIntyre et al. (1994) highlight 'vision', 'sensitivity' and 'strength of purpose' as being key attributes.

Developing the role of the ITT co-ordinator

Within the literature related to the role of the school ITT co-ordinator certain issues and tensions are identified. The way in which the mentoring role is conceptualised differently in primary schools and secondary schools is highlighted by Campbell and Kane (1996). In their research into the culture of mentoring in the former they found that it is often the class teacher who is responsible for both the providing support and guidance not only in relation to classroom teaching and learning but also in relation to wider school issues, and that these mentors have no colleague to monitor their work in this respect. They therefore argue for the management of mentoring to rest with a member of the school's senior management team. They also highlight the tensions that can arise when the primary school mentor is not actually the class teacher to whom the trainee is attached and when the delineation or responsibilities is implied rather than explicit.

This question arises again in relation to the status of the ITT co-ordinator in secondary schools. On the one hand there are those that argue that:

“... it has to be done at deputy level...First and foremost, if you are writing summative reports, you have to have a lot of experience of trainee teachers in a range of disciplines and you have to have curricular knowledge across a wide area ...”
(professional mentor/ deputy headteacher) (quoted in Brooks and Sikes 1997)

However there is also the view that:

“Where (trainees) are seen as a necessary evil, managed, but not developed, by a professional mentor who is a member of the senior team without either time or recognition for the liaison work necessary, the attitude of the school staff as a whole tends to see the activity as an additional burden, often with limited empathy or support for the training process” (Glover and Mardle 1996)

The potential for the professional development of those undertaking the role may be significant and can be enhanced by the way in which the role is conceptualised by a given school or within any individual partnership. Utley et al. (2003) outline the way that some Professional Development Schools in the United States, in conjunction with the HEI, the role of the 'site co-ordinator' as been enhanced significantly and has become a full-time post within the school. The site co-ordinator's role has developed in relation to the demands of implementing the multiple functions of a partnership school (namely, teacher preparation, professional development, supporting curriculum development in the school and research and inquiry) but the nature of the development has also been influenced by the culture and leadership of the individual schools in question as well as by the personal qualities and interests of the site co-ordinators themselves. Utley et al. outline the personal and professional benefits that have accrued to the site co-ordinator as a result of enhancing the role, and list these as:

- Professional generosity embedded in relationships (i.e. working with other colleagues and sharing ideas for practice)
- Rejuvenation
- The enhancement of knowledge, abilities and skills
- New opportunities to exercise leadership (Utley et al. 2003)

The authors also discuss the challenges resulting from the development, including the need to adapt to new ways of working and new timetables, the potential ambiguity of the role, conflicting expectations etc.

Implications

With teacher training in this country continuing to undergo significant change and with the growing expertise in schools in terms of the preparation of beginning teachers the role of the ITT co-ordinator has the potential to become a significant and increasingly rewarding one. At present the way in which the role is conceptualised depends to a great extent on the nature of individual ITT partnerships between schools and HEIs, the emphasis placed in the school on the professional development of new entrants to the profession and, to a certain extent, on the personality and characteristics of those carrying out the role. ITT co-ordinators need all the attributes of effective mentors yet much more, both in terms of managerial skills (the design and implantation of the school-based programme; liaison with mentors and members of the school's senior management team; liaison with the HEI or other provider; provision of effective training programmes for those on work-based routes into teaching etc.) as well the ability to engage with adult learners in appropriate ways and to deliver thought provoking and challenging programmes that enable trainees to make sense of what they are learning from a wide range of perspectives.

In spite of the many references in the professional literature to the role of the ITT co-ordinator in schools there is still little in the way of empirical evidence as to how this role is being fulfilled and research needs to be carried out to establish what constitutes effective practice, how school-based ITT co-ordinators manage the tensions inherent in the role, the way in which differing conceptualisations of partnership affect the way in which co-ordinators fulfil their responsibilities, the benefits that accrue from performing the role etc.

The current study sought to address some of these questions using a range of data collection method, namely a review of the course documentation from the HEI providers within the SE1 region, interviews with a number of ITT co-ordinators about the nature of their role and a questionnaire sent to a number of ITT co-ordinators. A more detailed account of the research methodology for each of the above and an analysis of the data obtained are provided below.

HEI provider documentation in relation to the ITT co-ordinator (professional tutor) role

Participants

Open University (OU): Secondary flexible PGCE
Oxford Brookes University (OBU): Primary PGCE, BA Primary Teacher Education, Secondary PGCE, work-based BA with QTS
Oxford University Department of Educational Studies (OUDES) Secondary PGCE
University of Reading (UR): Secondary PGCE, BA (Ed) Primary, PGCE Primary

Documentation scrutinised

OU

Supporting Professional Development in ITT

Partnership Handbook

CD ROM: mentor resources

(plus conversations with former and current PGCE Director, subject leaders and course manager)

OBU

Introduction to Partnership Handbook

Note from Senior Mentor for Primary Partnership

Note from School Liaison Tutor re Secondary PGCE mentor training opportunities

OUDES

Email response from subject leader

UR

Minutes of *Professional Tutors' Development meetings* (x3)
Materials for *new Professional Tutor/Subject Mentor Training*
Professional Studies Handbook
Professional Tutor Guide
Primary ITE Partnership Handbook

Commentary

The data gathered from these materials have been analysed by one researcher, who knew the OU course better than those offered by OBU, OUDES and UR. As such, any interpretations and conclusions should be treated with suitable caution. However, the ongoing analysis has been shared with colleagues from all HEIs, and it is agreed there is sufficient data to develop a reasonably clear picture of how the four HEIs conceptualise the School Co-ordinator/Professional Tutor role. It is apparent that the role of School Co-ordinator/Professional Tutor is conceptualised differently in face-to-face secondary training, in distance learning secondary training and in face-to-face primary training.

The three providers of full-time secondary PGCE (OBU, OUDES and UR) are most similar in the roles and responsibilities described and the support offered. They also use the term "Professional Tutor". Professional Tutors in secondary schools have three distinct roles in ITT. First, (pedagogical), is their responsibility for face-to-face teaching of professional studies to trainees. Second, (managerial), is their QA liaison with the relevant HEI. They have to ensure mentors have the time and skills to provide the level of support needed to enable trainees to meet the standards for QTS. Third, (pastoral), is the responsibility to counsel trainees and/or mentors when problems occur.

The OU secondary flexible PGCE programme (which refers to a "school co-ordinator") is recognisable in terms of the management liaison with the HEI, and the pastoral function when problems occur, but differs from the above in two ways. First, because the distance learning materials provide the teaching input for the professional studies area, the co-ordinator role is one of quality assurance and monitoring standards, rather than hands-on teaching of professional studies. Second, the distance-learning dimension on a flexible PGCE impacts on the type of training/briefing offered.

Most radically different is the primary conceptualisation at OBU and UR. This is entirely explained by the specific phase focus of the primary partnership role. It would seem that, on this evidence, the School Co-ordinator/Professional Tutor role delivering professional studies does not really exist in Primary ITT. At OBU, the Headteacher or lead mentor or network mentor picks up a QA/monitoring role which is incorporated into their observation of teaching and HEI liaison. At UR, the Partnership School Mentor Co-ordinator (PSMC) oversees the development of the learner teacher, taking particular responsibility for whole-school practices (ie risk assessment procedures) and enabling access to school documentation and relevant team meetings. The PSMC has a role in observing teaching, and they liaise with mentors and university tutors if there are development issues. They are included in the procedures for weak or failing trainees:

The School Mentor Co-ordinator may be invited to make an observation of the trainee teaching and read their file. Targets will be set...

Unfortunately, there is as yet no data on the role as it is conceptualised in relation to SCITT programmes.

Initial training for co-ordinators

Both OUDES and UR secondary PGCE programmes incorporate senior teachers new to the ITT co-ordinator/professional tutor role into whole day dedicated new mentor training/briefing events held at the HEI at the start of the academic year. These events enable partnership documentation to be shared, and include input on the working of the partnership, working with adults and teachers as teacher educators. While UR emphasise a “buddy mentor” system as part of induction into the mentoring role, there does not seem to be an explicit “buddy professional tutor” equivalent in operation in any HEI, although informal arrangements have been reported. The OU have an e-conference for school co-ordinators on a regional basis, but this has not yet evolved into an effective professional network.

The OU flexible model is, of necessity, very different. As a national distance provider of flexible ITT it is not possible to bring co-ordinators together in any meaningful local/regional grouping at the start of an academic year. In addition, most co-ordinators entering into partnership with the OU are already experienced with other HEIs. So, training is prioritised at highlighting the similarities and differences between flexible and traditional ITT. This is provided in two interactions:

First, the OU regionally-based academic (“Staff Tutor”) has a face-to-face or telephone dialogue with the school co-ordinator to clarify partnership arrangements and confirm a contracted partnership with the school. Second, once a student has been allocated for placement, a subject specialist “briefing tutor” visits the newly signed-up school, primarily to get the new mentor up-to speed on OU systems. As part of this visit there is likely to be additional contact with the co-ordinator.

OBU’s primary PGCE course provides one day’s training termly for new mentors, and anyone else (ie lead mentor/Head teacher with responsibility for ITT) in a partnership role who needs to be included. This takes place at the HEI and is organised to support the school experience. OBU’s secondary PGCE provided for the induction of new Professional Tutors in their own schools by the School Liaison Tutor. Her perception is schools have “a more professional attitude to this role” and see it as an opportunity for staff development as well as for the benefit of trainees.

It appears that HEIs also offer School Co-ordinators/Professional Tutors access to continuing professional development. For example, UR explicitly offer free modules (within a set framework) on their own taught Masters. OBU offer a certificate of professional development and access to a Masters degree. OU offer annual 10-20% fee reductions on OU masters courses to partner school co-ordinators.

Scheduled meetings

At OUDES, professional tutors meet once per term in the HEI to discuss partnership issues, the professional development programme and their roles and responsibilities. This is regarded as ongoing professional development.

At UR, termly half-day Professional Tutors’ Development meetings are held in the HEI offering opportunities to provide course updates, QA evaluations and to share good practice (for example PTs to take an explicit interest in the progress of individual students by observation, to monitor the quality of mentor reports in addition to providing comments on professional standards, to manage a mentor team, to monitor the form tutor role).

UR's Primary Mentor Co-ordinators attend Mentorship Development training so "they are aware of current issues and expectations".

The OU offer an annual half-day meeting for school co-ordinators in each region at which course or Ofsted updates are offered and evaluations are encouraged. These meetings (like all OU face-to face provision) are voluntary.

OBU have termly partnership committee meetings organised through their lead schools (20 supporting the total of 500 in the primary partnership) in local cluster networks at which HEI tutors are present. These focus on course development. In addition, half-day moderation training meetings are held at the HEI or in the lead school networks to support the moderation of standards.

Resources

For OUDES, the key document for school co-ordinators is the *Handbook for Mentors and Professional Tutors*. This is revised annually, and includes course documentation as well as suggested strategies and skills for mentors and professional tutors.

UR provide a *Professional Tutor Guide* with the annual partnership contract. This lists eleven primary responsibilities of a Professional Tutor (including school ITT policy, management of mentors, professional studies seminars, facilitation of whole school issues, monitoring and assessment of trainees, and engagement with QA and training). Additionally, a *Professional Studies Handbook* supports the organisation of a programme of tutorials and seminars exploring whole school issues.

The OU provide a folder insert *Supporting Professional Development in ITT*, which, although aimed at mentors, tutors and students, "also provides useful information for school co-ordinators". This contains a number of interactive training activities linked to audio and video exemplars on a CD-Rom (although these are only relevant to mentor training). Partnership schools also receive a *Partnership Handbook* detailing the roles and responsibilities of mentors and school co-ordinators. These materials emphasise the co-ordinator's QA role and their engagement with summative assessment. Until recently, an OU school co-ordinator was required to observe a student teacher fortnightly in addition to the regular mentor observations.

Co-ordinators (like students, mentors and students) can access all the OU PGCE materials and e-forms via the course website. Electronic conferencing to provide peer support is in place for co-ordinators through each region (though it should be noted that, in the absence of a critical mass, this has not taken off).

OBU issue an *Introduction to Partnership* booklet to all schools in the primary partnership, supplemented by a termly partnership newsletter. Mentors are increasingly being given access to the OBU website. Primary Mentor Co-ordinators receive a copy of the Partnership Handbook. OBU's secondary PGCE send a partnership newsletter to all their schools.

School Contact

For OUDES, a "General Tutor" liaises with the Professional Tutor in each school and can discuss issues as necessary during any of the five scheduled visits. This is viable because of the economic efficiency of having clusters on interns in each school.

UR have a similar role. Where training issues emerge, the Professional Tutor would contact the HEI. In addition, there are QA visits scheduled to any school Professional Tutor including new Professional Tutors.

In the OU scheme, a subject tutor or subject leader visits each school placement to support the mentor and assess the student against the standards. Part of the agenda is a space for a brief meeting with school co-ordinators, but this is usually a courtesy unless an issue emerges or unless the co-ordinator is inexperienced.

The OBU primary PGCE course dispatch the HEI tutor to jointly observe the trainee with the lead mentor.

Conclusions from the review of the course documentation

A survey of ITT co-ordinator / Professional Tutor documentation voluntarily provided by the four HEIs in the region provides partial evidence of the way each institution conceptualises the role. Analysis of the documentation suggests the following:

- Traditional secondary PGCE courses (OUDES, OBU, UR) have a well-established rationale for the Professional Tutor role. This includes responsibility for organising and delivering school-based face-to-face training in professional studies, managing and monitoring the work of teams of mentors, and moderating assessment of trainees by observation and scrutiny of trainee's files. New Professional Tutors are trained, and experienced Professional Tutors receive regular course updating and are provided with opportunities to evaluate the partnership.
- Flexible distance learning secondary PGCE courses (OU) have a clear rationale for the QA and monitoring of assessment Co-ordinator roles. In the absence of a hands-on professional studies role, they are perhaps less engaged with training. Almost all co-ordinators are already experienced with other providers.
- Primary PGCE/BA Teacher Education courses (UR, OBU) organise partnership differently. The school's management of ITT issues is perhaps the closest to a Professional Tutor / ITT co-ordinator role, but this responsibility is carried out by a Partnership School Mentor co-ordinator (UR), or can be picked up by a Headteacher, Lead Mentor or Network Mentor (OBU). The scale of the OBU partnership network enables the Network Mentor to support the role in other schools.

So, even trawling for parallel roles between secondary and primary ITT partnerships, the different nomenclature makes comparison somewhat difficult. Further research in the form of a questionnaire survey and interviews was therefore carried out in order to build a clearer conceptualisation and to clarify common strands across providers.

Telephone Interview Data Analysis

In seeking to further explore understanding of the school coordinator (professional tutor/lead mentor) role in ITT partnership(s), a series of six 45 minute semi-structured telephone interviews were conducted with a sample of school coordinators. These were audio recorded. The two primary (responses 1, 2) were suggested by Oxford Brookes as active partner schools. The four secondary (3, 4, 5, 6) were all training schools working with a number of ITT providers and were suggested by the four HEIs (Open University, Oxford, Oxford Brookes, Reading) undertaking the research. Every coordinator agreed voluntarily. Each interview consisted of the same prompts, asked in the same order by the same interviewer and each audio recording was transcribed, totalling 40 pages of data.

The intention was to explore:

- i) What the role involves
- ii) How the role complements other professional responsibilities
- iii) What skills and knowledge and training are needed

How did you become the coordinator? When did you take on the role?

We were interested in establishing the career paths coordinator colleagues had taken to becoming a senior member of staff with a vital and unique responsibility for ITT in their school. Reflecting the findings from our questionnaire data, primary colleagues were relatively less experienced teachers and had been performing the role for a shorter period of time.

I became a school mentor...and the university tutor came in to do the reports and started talking about the network she was developing and asked us to take a lead in the school. (1)

I had a very good experience as a student...I wanted to give that back to people...I feel I have a duty to be part of training the new generation of teachers. When I came to my current school, we didn't have a lot of students so I tried to raise that profile. It was my passion. (2)

Secondary colleagues, again reflecting our questionnaire findings were more experienced teachers who had been in the coordinator role for sustained periods of their careers. In two of the four secondary examples, the coordinator role would be the culmination of long and distinguished careers in their schools.

I spent a year on secondment as part of the internship development group about 17 years ago...during that year a vacancy became available here as a professional tutor and I was asked whether it was something I would like to do. (3)

I joined the school nearly 16 years ago as deputy head, one of the roles I picked up was professional tutor...some people (as you go through schools) are more people driven. (5)

I was promoted to assistant head...it was always part of the job description...initially ITT was just a sideline tacked on to NQT responsibility. When we became a training school the role really took off...the role was negligible prior to becoming a training school. (6)

It is noteworthy that responses from (2) and (6) suggest a self-starting momentum, with colleagues deliberately and consciously initiating or pursuing ITT links. In other words, there is evidence of a personal rather than an institutional policy dimension to the role.

With which HEIs do you work? Do you think there are advantages or disadvantages in working with more than one provider?

This response revealed a particularly striking contrast between primary and secondary ITT. For reasons to do with smaller size and long-established local ITT links, even primary schools considered active in ITT partnerships consciously chose to work with only one provider.

I felt for me it was more productive to build a relationship with one institution than more than one. (1)

At any one time I'm only taking a couple of trainees. Everyone goes through the same training and we know what to expect. Having more than one provider would complicate matters. (2)

This differs from the (by definition) active in ITT partnership secondary training schools. Evidence for this distinctiveness came from the significant range of providers the secondary schools worked with (five or six each), and the sizeable number of trainees welcomed per year (from high twenties to high forties). This latter number even excludes, as coordinators admitted, any Student Associate Scheme placements which arguably fulfil a similar ITT partnership role.

Currently our biggest contingent is from OUDES and we also work with OU, OBU, Brighton and Oxon and Bucks DRB. This year we probably total 47 trainees. That's fairly typical...There are disadvantages: each scheme tends to have it's own programme in terms of timing and staff development. The advantage is we are interested in mentoring our trainees as a vital part of our own staff development. OUDES only do six subjects so we want to give other areas opportunities to work with trainees...it's an intentional policy. (3)

We work with six, OUDES, OBU, Warwick, De Montfort, OU, UWE. We offer 38 placements...the advantages are that we can get more subject coverage. A large number of ITT students in schools benefit departments, and I think children benefit in the classroom as well...with placement timing I think it's an advantage to go in and out at different times...it's been a major source of recruitment...I can't find any disadvantages. (4)

We work with SWELTEC (Brunel, Roehampton and Kingston), OBU, Cambridge, OU. Generally there is lots of common ground...expectations in terms of mentoring ...we can deliver a core professional studies programme to all the trainees. Working with our four providers gives us flexibility, and we develop relationships with individual institutions. One disadvantage is the different systems for placements...we became a DRB and the training ethos sort of permeates every pore of the school...and then we became a training school...we have 20+ students per year. (5)

We have 30 trainees per year... we will take them from anywhere (OU, De Montfort, OBU, SWELTEC, Nottingham Trent)...the advantage is that you see a slightly different perspective, attitudes towards methods of training ...we take the best from all institutions in terms of our support for mentors...each HEI has different expectations of what we must provide...we say "this is what you must do for trainees in St Paul's". The school drives the training. We are looking for ways in which we can use ITT students so that experiences pupils are getting in classes are enhanced...trainees bring in resources that can be used...we exploit trainees' particular skills. (6)

It is noteworthy that in these secondary examples, coordinators report an intentional strategic school policy to expand ITT which is seen to enhance professional development opportunities throughout the school, to aid recruitment and to enhance the pupils' learning experience. In other words, these school coordinators are working in a context in which ITT is something to champion and celebrate, rather than be defensive about.

Has the role changed since you started?

Primary colleagues reacted positively to what they saw as a changed role, enjoying enhanced responsibility for initial training and opportunities afforded by ITT for professional networking.

It's developed...there are now more partnerships running...more people, more ideas, we are bouncing off each other...the benefits are professionals getting together to talk. (2)

I remember when it was very much down to the university and we had a minimal role to play. I like the way it operates now, it's more down to schools. (1)

In secondary there is an empowered rhetoric around professional autonomy and liaison with other schools through ITT in the responses. The coordinator role is now seen as a more strategic one, at the centre of a school-wide commitment to ITT.

In effect I get invited to do 3 or 4 different professional tutor meetings. I go regularly to one because that's our largest. (3)

We weren't a training school when I first started, so recently the importance of ITT has increased, as an essential aspect of getting and using the funding. There is a lot of spin-off liaison with other schools now. (4)

In the last two years it has changed phenomenally. It is not just to do with the number of trainees you have in your schools, it's the way you think about what's happening, it's about what they bring to the whole school...you have to think more strategically about the number of trainees that are going to be in school over the whole year...how you're going to position them across the whole school...the departments are saying "we want to work with trainees"...if I've got a trainee teacher who needs to work with a different tutor group for two weeks, any volunteers, I get five people. That's really exciting. (6)

Do you support ITT partnerships in schools other than your own?

The limited evidence of link work and networking with other local schools offers an intriguing potential element of the coordinator role, which could be more integral, and exploited more if the time resource were available (workforce remodelling anyone?) As examples of the way the role could develop, the leadership of primary ITT cluster meetings, secondary/primary ITT liaison and the work associated with Partnership Promotion schools all offer colleagues something to build on. Such work could give ITT coordinators a really credible role in developing the profession, enabling insights and good practice accumulated from years of experience to be more effectively shared.

We ran the Milton Keynes excellence cluster, a partnership between four schools in MK. The trainee teachers came to St. Paul's for professional studies and we had mentor training every half term for all the mentors across the four schools which meant we were liaising and sharing practice. (6)

I've been invited to run part of the professional tutor training that the HEI are offering...we do have some links with our primary partners because I run a programme where the bulk of our trainees get an opportunity to spend three mornings a week in one of our local primaries. Then we work a reciprocal basis if our primaries have anybody who wants to come and see Year 7 at work. (3)

Is the role primarily about management? What are your key management roles in the ITT partnership(s)?

In line with what the literature, the HEI documentation and our questionnaire responses suggest, the management dimension of the coordinator role is seen as the key one in terms of time commitment and visible responsibility. Much of that management comes through links with HEIs seeking placements (outward facing coordination). However, of equal importance are the negotiations with departments and individual colleagues (inward coordination). This aspect of the role is more to do with the nitty gritty of setting up the details of year on year partnership arrangements (the start-up) rather than ongoing processes, which tend to be handled by individual mentors. Interestingly, the management aspect is not the one which excited or enthused colleagues in their responses.

The management side is what comes first (1)

I organise and liaise with the university...I talk to our staff and ask who would find it beneficial to work with trainees next year. (2)

There is an important management element, in the sense that I'm the link person in terms of making offers...making sure we are actually fulfilling the needs of the trainees that come our way...I get involved with some of the discussions with different departments when they are suggesting people who ought to be mentors...personally talking to people to find out if they are prepared to be involved...my priority is quality. (3)

I'm the one actually liaising with them on initial contact, so I'll turn around and say yes, we can have this many students...I try to make sure that I am the first port of call...retraining the HEIs to use the ITT coordinator as point of contact. (6)

What training/teaching do you do with trainees or mentors?

A significant contrast between what secondary coordinators do in traditional face-to-face ITT and what primary or flexible distance learning provision demands is best exemplified in the expectations in relation to the teaching of trainees.

OBU have mentor training...we hosted that last year for the Newbury area...apart from those meetings and an informal chat, I'm not involved in training more than that. (2)

However, not only do secondary colleagues organise weekly professional studies programmes, they lead in the teaching of many of these sessions.

I coordinate and run or lead a lot of our professional development programme which is a weekly slot right across the year (3)

I deliver some of that core studies programme but I also facilitate a lot of the rest of it. (5)

I decide what goes into the professional studies programme, I will often lead different sessions and professional studies programmes. I much prefer it if I can get different members of staff to do that, because it's such a professional development opportunity for them. I'm tending to bring members of staff in who have expressed an interest in delivering something. I bring them in to team deliver with me, and then at a later stage they are on their own. (6)

This provision of a full professional studies programme is important for coordinators in its potential to enable a wide range of school staff to contribute as a way of enhancing their own professional development.

Do you have to “mentor the mentors”?

There appears to be some inconsistency about the extent to which coordinators are in a position to “mentor the mentors”. In primary, lead mentors report being pretty hands-off with their colleagues, perceiving all support and training for mentors to be provided by the HEI. In secondary, the increased scale of ITT provision in these schools means new mentors are increasingly having to be briefed by coordinators. Regular meetings organised by the coordinator for all mentors enable good ITT practice to be shared, but with pressure on all teachers' time, this is not always possible. What is clear is that the ability to be around the whole school, to be available to chat informally with mentors about how things are going, is a vital element in successful ITT.

We work with more than one HEI: different HEIs have different expectations of the mentors, it's also to do with cherry-picking the best bits from each institution...it is mentoring the mentors, if for example I have a new mentor I would work with that mentor in a slightly

different way than I would with an established one. There are also formal training sessions for new mentors, and sharing of good practice sessions. I would also work with mentors troubleshooting. (6)

I used to probably have mentor meetings three or four times a year, where we can swap information and ideas, and discuss if there are any problems. Now I tend to pick up issues with individuals when they arrive...I have three or four new mentors next year and it may be that they need more support from me...what I'm not achieving here at the moment is shared good practice. (3)

I oversee the work of the mentors and act as their mentor...it's very informal and it ought not to be...subconsciously I keep an eye on the mentors, talk to them about what they are doing. (5)

It is important for mentors in schools to talk about how things are going and share what is going on, so we meet once a half term...often people in my role do NQTs as well and I think induction tutors are less clear on how to help an NQT than how to help a trainee. (4)

Interestingly, the mention of induction tutors suggests a real gap in training and professional development. Whether the skills accumulated by ITT coordinators are generic and could be explicitly transferred to NQT contexts is worthy of a further research study.

Do you have a pastoral role in the ITT partnership?

Although some of the literature discusses a pastoral role for ITT coordinators, and interviewees reported being happy to “step in” as needed, there is little evidence that this is a key dimension. Rather, the role appears a little more distant, with an occasional intermediary role as an ombudsman as part of quality assurance.

I have had quite a strained relationship with teacher tutors and trainees where I have had to intervene...to take off the intensity of the relationship a bit...it hasn't happened a lot, but I do take that on if it does happen. (2)

Should there be problems...I would then contact the general tutor and we would discuss the issues...my age also generally puts me in a paternal type role, as the majority of our trainees are younger than me. (3)

Unless the trainee has a problem with their mentor they would mostly go to them. If they were having personal or professional problems, then the mentor would come to me. Occasionally the university have contacted me and said there is a problem that doesn't need to go any further. (4)

The pastoral role is enhanced by every professional studies session that we have...I am always in the room even if I'm not actually delivering a session. (6)

What advice would you give someone newly-appointed to the role? What sort of training would be appropriate?

The University gives a bit of guidance when you first start out...it was clear what I was meant to do. (1)

Generic training is much more different to think about because the needs of individual courses are quite specific, the role that you fulfil is slightly different...my primary colleagues see having any adult in the school as something they want to tell the parents about...(3)

There is a lot of support through professional tutor networks, and the one at OUDES is very tightly knit...it's a small partnership so you can all know each other...a bit of them have been doing it for ages...so there is a stable core there. Discussion at those meetings is often in some depth...I have been asked on a few times to informally buddy new professional tutors...they spend an afternoon with me...go off with my materials and interpret it and do it how they want. (4)

Being organised is very important...shadowing as part of succession planning...like a handbook for the trainees...mentor yourself to get to know the standards again...(5)

How can they manage and establish a pastoral role that is not time intensive...how to get the best out of your mentors to make them think creatively about how to use trainee teachers for the benefit of teaching and learning...The training I have had in the past two years has been stolen from people with experience. (6)

What could be done to make your role more effective (ie in the development of mentors? In the retention of trainees?) Is there anything the HEI(s) could do?

I think the role has come quite a long way in the last two years...it's important to educate the schools on the importance of us in training the next generation of teachers. (2)

There are certain topics that it is felt are better dealt with in schools than perhaps in the university. They are often actually the more difficult things and sometimes less interesting things (i.e. a slot on rights and responsibilities)...you don't necessarily feel that well equipped yourself. (3)

I suppose you could have more generic training material but then part of the joy of being a professional tutor is doing your own. (4)

Time mainly. The provision of mentor training is patchy...(5)

The only thing I have an issue with is if I'm not the first port of call. When you're dealing with lots of trainees, it's very important that somebody is overseeing that. If things are going wrong the professional tutor needs to be kept in the loop...you do need to know what is going on so that you can strategically manage it. (6)

What impact has your coordinator role in ITT had on your own professional development? Has it led to, or complemented, other professional development opportunities?

In one of the first HEI meetings they are talking about trainees who are doing MFL that led to having a native French speaker...I was soon introducing the new framework for MFL and introducing French into other primary schools. (1)

It's guided where I want to go in the future...my links with mentoring have shown me where I want my career path to go and professionally it's stimulating. (2)

It gives a wonderful forum to meet people, and I think that networking is really important, sharing ideas and concerns. (3)

It's been a big source of professional development for me, from responsibility ITT to NCTS to be the training school manager (4)

It's had a big impact because I've ended up a DRB manager...I'm much more conscious of analysing my own teaching...I've enjoyed working more widely with HEIs. (5)

It's had an impact on my own career development...because I'm a member of the senior management team...it's affected me in terms of my professional practice because I have been delivering sessions. (6)

Do you have any other comments on the coordinator role?

The most striking thing about responses to this final question is the uniformity across both sectors. Regardless of personal and professional contexts, coordinators loved their jobs and gained a great deal of professional esteem from the ITT responsibility.

It has been a very worthwhile experience. (1)

I think it's a very valuable role. There need to be continual links between ITT agencies and the schools they're working with. (2)

It's fantastically rewarding. I get a huge kick out of working with new teachers and having enthusiastic teachers around who are in the learning stage. (3)

It's a really nice job to do in school, I'm very lucky. (4)

It's a fantastic role...the more experience you have working with trainee teachers the more you see the benefits...I find people new to working with ITT students can be quite harsh with them. It's part of the professional tutor role to be nurturing. (6)

In conclusion, although the interview data has been gathered from a relatively small sample of keen and enthusiastic participants, a number of interesting threads can be detected which extends what the literature suggests about the role, and complements what our HEI documentation and questionnaire responses illuminated. The ITT coordinator role involves significant management responsibilities, both outwards to the HEI(s) and inwards with departments and individual mentors. Secondary coordinators enjoy regular teaching opportunities in professional studies sessions, and are able to facilitate full programmes by opening up professional development opportunities to other staff. The pastoral role is an occasional reactive one rather than a proactive element.

The role complements other professional responsibilities shared by many coordinators, including responsibility for NQTs. The skills and knowledge are accumulated through experience rather than relying on training, and are mainly developed through networking with HEI ITT colleagues coordinators in other schools.

Headline findings

- School coordinator role suffers from different nomenclature and different conceptualisation across: F2F secondary (“Professional Tutor” teaching professional studies, monitoring mentors, liaison with HEI partners, regular partnership meetings); F2F primary (“Lead mentor” linking school with HEI, leading clusters); flexible secondary (“School coordinator” as gatekeeper with a QA role)
- Academic literature and national policy has presented the school coordinator as the key to successful ITT partnership, but coverage is limited, consisting of prescription

and description rather than empirical analysis (unlike the mentor role which enjoys a plethora of attention).

- Academic literature highlights four strands: managerial (oversight/liaison, induction); pedagogical (lead professional studies teaching, a dialectic of the ideal v the practical); evaluative (moderating assessment of professional values outside classroom performance); pastoral (general well-being of trainees)
- Emerging issue of status: autonomous; delegated from Head; member of SMT; multi-functioning “Master teacher”; other responsibilities include CPD, NQTs, performance management.
- Secondary coordinators tend to be experienced teachers (15+ years) who have been in the role for many years. They love the job, finding aspects like the professional development through networking and the engagement with new ideas from trainees/HEIs energising.
- Primary “lead mentors” tend to be somewhat younger and less experienced. They enjoy the role, especially the potential to contribute to the HEI training through cluster meetings.
- Secondary Training schools are working with at least six providers, training between 30 and 45 trainees per year across all subjects (excluding regular influxes of SaS students).
- Primary schools tend to work with one HEI and take a maximum of two trainees per year.
- Interviewees uniformly regarded ITT trainees as a positive impact on the school. At the higher numbers, this was regarded as enriching the school culture and enhancing the discourse around effective teaching and learning amongst all staff. It also enabled experimental teaching to go on (lots of “extra staff”)

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