

Gillian Peiser<sup>a\*</sup> Debbie Duncalf<sup>b</sup> Andrea Mallaburn<sup>c</sup>

<sup>a</sup>*School of Education, Liverpool John Moores University, Liverpool, UK*

<sup>b</sup>*School of Education, Liverpool John Moores University, Liverpool, UK*

<sup>c</sup>*School of Education, Liverpool John Moores University, Liverpool, UK*

Gillian Peiser [g.peiser@ljmu.ac.uk](mailto:g.peiser@ljmu.ac.uk) \*corresponding author

**Gillian Peiser** is a Senior Lecturer in Teacher Education at LJMU. Her research interests are in teacher development, research informed teacher education, intercultural learning, and enrichment learning for students from non-traditional backgrounds. She works closely with teacher mentors in her professional role and has been the principle investigator on a research project entitled: Mentoring Across Professions.

**Debbie Duncalf** is a Senior Lecturer in Professional Learning and Teacher Education (Technology) at Liverpool John Moores University. Debbie is involved in extensive research around coaching and mentoring in schools and across a range of professions. The impact of research linked to teachers and their practice is also another area of her interests.

**Andrea Mallaburn** is a Senior Lecturer in Teacher Education (Chemistry) and the ITT Partnership Lead at Liverpool John Moores University. She conducts research in education linked to teachers and learners in socially challenging circumstances and coaching and mentoring in conjunction with schools. She is part of an extending research team who are focussing upon mentoring across a range of professions.

## **The role of the mentor in an increasingly school-led English initial teacher education policy context**

Against an international policy backdrop that favours school-led initial teacher education, this paper presents the results of a study seeking to explore the role of the teacher mentor in the English context. Using an online survey (n=64) and semi-structured interviews (n=7), the study examined how mentors conceptualised their roles and related skills, and if perceptions varied depending on whether they supported mentees on school-led or university-led routes, and, or, other contextual variables. In light of preliminary findings from the survey, suggesting that views could be affected by the particular workplace in which mentors were located, the second (interview) phase of the research was theoretically underpinned by Kemmis *et al.*'s (2014) 'practice architectures' framework. Whilst overall the findings revealed that perceptions and reported practices continued to be influenced by structural factors identified in existent studies, they also suggested the emergence and impact of new cultural and situational dynamics, characterising practice architectures, at school level. The authors consider the reasons for variations in practice architectures and the implications for future mentor development.

Keywords: mentor; initial teacher education; teacher educator; practice architectures; learning communities.

### **Introduction**

This paper examines the role of the school-based mentor in initial teacher education (ITE) in England in an increasingly school-led policy context. Until fairly recently, university schools of education were largely responsible for pre-service preparation courses of teachers in England, working in partnership with schools, where student teachers carried out teaching practice placements. In 2012, the then Secretary of State

for Education, Michael Gove, announced plans to give schools greater control over the recruitment and pre-service preparation of teachers on postgraduate routes in England. His ambition was that schools were to deliver ‘well over half’ of all training places by 2015 (Gove 2012). This decision followed the 2010 White Paper (DfE 2010), which called for reform of initial teacher training with the expansion of school-led, as opposed to university-led, routes with an increase in the time student teachers should spend in the classroom. Whilst employment based routes into teaching existed alongside those managed by universities prior to this, a new school-led ‘School Direct’ route was launched in 2012/13. In 2011/12, universities held 80% of the teacher education places (Universities UK 2014). By 2018/19, this figure had dropped to 47%, with 53% of the places held by school-led providers (DfE 2018).

This policy development was part of a drive to create a ‘self-improving school-led system’ that aimed to improve the quality of the workforce by allowing schools to take control of recruitment and training of teachers. Under School Direct, designated ‘teaching schools’ and their strategic partners were to plan and manage teacher training that linked with the priorities of their alliances with other schools and their own school improvement planning (NCTL 2013). On completion of initial teacher training and achievement of qualified teacher status (QTS), the school or another school in the teaching school alliance, was expected to employ the trainee (Matthews and Berwick 2013). Davies *et al.* (2016) argue that this policy development belongs to an array of others that change the nature of professionalism in teaching. Referring to Evetts (2009), they contend that the move towards a school-led system, places emphasis on *organisational professionalism*, which is concerned with context specific preparation and is short-termist in nature, rather than *occupational professionalism* which takes more universal and long-term approaches promoted by universities. In 2016, the

government reiterated support for an increasingly school-led initial teacher training (ITT) system in order ‘to improve content and delivery’ of teacher preparation courses (DfE 2016a, p.27).

Whilst this policy was envisaged as a means of creating high quality teacher supply that met local needs, it can also be interpreted as the state’s response to teacher education as a ‘policy problem’ (Cochran Smith 2005), which it has attempted to solve by shifting the responsibility from universities to schools (Mutton *et al.* 2017). When looking for reasons for teachers’ inadequacies, policy makers have often blamed the gap between theoretical and practical knowledge brought about by university-models for ITE (Cochran-Smith 2016).

It is important to note, however, that professional learning ‘on the job’ in schools has been statutory since 1992, with an obligation for student teachers in England to spend 120 out of the 180 days of their postgraduate course on teaching placement (DFE 1992, 1993). The placement experience has been closely supported by a practising teacher colleague, or ‘mentor’, from the placement school(s). Whilst university tutors have assisted in some of this work, the day-to-day support in schools and the assessment of student teachers’ progress in relation to the Teachers’ Standards (DfE 2011), (the national professional framework for attaining qualified teacher status and entry to the profession), has been largely left to mentors. University tutors have typically taken on responsibility for the academically accredited aspects of ITE, helping students to make connections between the theoretical and practical domains. As the provider (the university) has been accountable for the recommendation to QTS and any final assessment grades, tutors have also played a quality assurance role.

Since student teachers on school-led courses spend more time in schools, with schools taking increasing responsibility for some of the 60 days previously assigned to

universities, the authors would argue that those responsible for their professional development in the workplace environment need to provide them with more support. Due to the increasing diversification of courses in ITE across Europe and beyond (with the increasing popularity of employment based / led routes), the European Commission (2013) has recognised the increased and wide-ranging role of the mentor. The term ‘teacher educator’ thus no longer only applies only to those who are employed by universities, but also to colleagues charged with the responsibility of supporting student teachers in schools, implying that they should now take on additional duties and responsibilities.

However, assuming such an extended role is no mean feat. Mutton *et al.* (2017) underline that in internationally recognised high quality models of ITE, universities and schools have *each* played particular roles, drawing on their own area of expertise, but working closely in partnership with each other. These models place importance on integrating different sources of knowledge (e.g. research-based understandings and the knowledge gained from practical experience). In this way, beginning teachers are encouraged to draw on a wide body of collective knowledge, pooled from a variety of different perspectives in order to inform autonomous decision-making (Winch et al. 2015). The emphasis on expansive learning and the promotion of autonomous, research-based decision-making are the key characteristics underpinning initial teacher *education* courses that also foster ‘occupational professionalism’. The shift to school-led provision potentially puts this type of partnership, and the essential ingredients of initial teacher *education*, at risk. This latter point is further supported by Gove’s comments (2010) who claimed that ‘(t)eaching is a craft and it is best learnt as an apprentice ...’, i.e. that teaching can only be learned in the context of school classrooms. This more restrictive view of teacher learning would seem to favour teacher *training* over education and

‘organisational professionalism’ over ‘occupational professionalism’ (Evetts 2009, in Davies *et al.* 2016).

The publication of the National Mentoring Standards for School-led Initial Teacher Training (ITT) (DfE 2016b) may allay concerns about *training* at the expense of *education* in recognising some of the new demands on mentors. (It should be noted that almost all English policy documents have historically referred to teacher training rather than teacher education and that the choice of words in the title of this document is not new.) Standard 2 states that ‘The mentor should enable the trainee to access, utilise and interpret robust educational research to inform their teaching ...’ (p.12) and Standard 4 states that ‘The mentor should continue to develop their own mentoring practice and subject and pedagogical expertise by accessing appropriate professional development and engaging with robust research (p.12)’. Nonetheless, Scott Douglas (2017, p. 854) points out that the Standards are ‘voluntary and do not necessarily represent consensus in the field’. Furthermore, as argued by White (2014, p.447) ‘To expect those with a dual role of teacher and teacher educator to develop an academic identity may be very challenging in terms of time commitment and accessibility to academic studying resources’.

Against this complex policy backdrop, our study sought to investigate how mentors themselves perceive their changing roles. In particular, it examined three research questions:

- (1) How do mentors conceptualise their roles and describe their work?
- (2) According to mentors, what factors enable or constrain their ability to carry out their work?

(3) Do mentors' views and reported practices vary depending on ITE programme affiliation (university-led or school-led), and, or other contextual variables?

The paper firstly reviews the literature about the ways and means of teacher mentoring and the impact of structural factors in school and at the national level on practice.

Subsequently, it outlines the methodology, explaining the two phases of the study and the application of Kemmis et al.'s (2014) 'practice architecture' conceptual framework. It then presents the key findings and finally considers the implications of the research for future mentor development and partnership relationships between university schools of education and schools.

## **Literature review**

### ***Ways and means of teacher mentoring***

The various conceptualisations of teacher mentoring echo theoretical thinking and policy influences at different times. In the 1980s, a humanistic influence, inspired by the work of Rogers (1974 cited Sündli 2007, p. 203), and concerns with teacher attrition by consequence of 'reality shock' (Wang and Odell 2002), emphasised the importance of the mentor's emotional support. Thereafter, there followed a shift towards a more rational approach with emphasis on practical reasoning. Through facilitated conversations involving 'reflection on-action' (Schön 1983), the mentor's role was to promote reflective practice and to provide practical and contextual advice (Wang and Odell 2002).

From the 1990s, some teacher educators promoted a critical constructivist approach (Wang and Odell 2002). Concerned that mentor modelling of suitable behaviours led to the reproduction of the status quo, they advocated that mentors and their mentees should act as agents of change, collaboratively taking an ‘inquiry stance’ (Cochran-Smith and Lytle 2009) in order to generate new knowledge and change. These educationalists also emphasised the importance of democratic and participant centred approaches, favouring collaborative and educative mentor-mentee relationships (Feiman-Nemser 1998, Earl and Timperley 2008, Timperley and Earl 2012, Mena *et al.* 2016). Although less politically inclined, the CUREE National Framework for Mentoring and Coaching (2005) also captures the contribution of shared analysis of learning experiences and reciprocity.

In spite of this variety of theoretical perspectives, research has established that mentees value multiple approaches. Harrison *et al.* (2006) and Crutcher and Naseem (2016) discovered that mentees rated role-modelling behaviour, interpersonal skills and the ability to promote reflective discussion. Izadinia (2015) stressed the importance of helping mentees to develop their teacher voice and identity, suggesting that the humanistic and educative orientations should operate in tandem. Whilst Furlong and Maynard (1995) point out that the way in which mentoring is conceptualised and practised depends on views about learning to teach, they highlight the need to be cognisant of teachers’ typical stages of learning and adapt their practices accordingly. Although ordinarily strategies shift from being directive to non-directive, Furlong and Maynard (1995) stress that mentoring approaches should be considered flexibly and cumulatively.



### ***Structural enablers and constraints of effective mentoring practice***

Whilst theoretical perspectives provide possibilities for practice, the onus to take on multiple roles can present difficulties. Not only are there tensions between nurturing and the need to challenge (Ingleby 2014, Hudson 2016), there are also conflicting loyalties between the supporter and assessor roles (Jones and Straker 2006, Hudson 2016, Schatz-Oppenheimer 2017). Writing from a Norwegian perspective and drawing on Biesta's (2009) concepts of 'qualification', 'socialisation' and 'subjectification' in relation to the overall contribution of education, Ulvik *et al.* (2018) highlight further challenges. Mentors are obliged to not only assess their mentees for 'qualification', but also to 'socialise' them into the teaching profession, facilitating access to the 'community of practice' (Lave and Wenger 1991) within the school, and at the same time, give them freedom to make their own choices, developing their own professional identity ('subjectification'). Ulvik *et al.* (ibid) found that student teachers reported great variance in terms of success 'socialisation' into the workplace, and their study noted how this impacted on beginning teachers' learning outcomes during the practicum. The authors stress that whilst mentors as individuals have responsibility to play in this regard, the school culture can also be influential. This finding supports the claims of Cherian (2007), Scalon (2008) and Long (2009), who all underscore the interference of the wider context, termed by Ambrosetti and Dekkers (2010, p. 118) as the 'cultural and situational features of the placement setting'.

Aderibigbe *et al.* (2016) also explain how the ways and means of mentoring can be directly impacted by culture and decision-making processes within schools, which range from being open and collaborative to hierarchical. Long (2009) argues how a pool of mentors rather than an individual mentor is the optimum way to support beginning teachers. The latter set-up not only enables mentors to seek one another's advice and

draw on each other for support, it also encourages strong learning community networks. In this way, mentees and mentors can explore issues as learning partners and ‘leadership is distributed in an emergent and benevolent way’ (p.323). In contrast, Schatz-Oppenheimer (2017) noted how in more hierarchical settings, where mentors are appointed by superiors, mentors may be subject to systemic demands, which can trickle down into the mentoring relationship. Hobson and Malderez (2013) found that the mentees frequently experienced ‘judgementoring’, i.e. mentors made value judgements of mentees’ practice or thinking in relation to how mentors thought things should be done, rather than openly exploring possible courses of action.

The need to satisfy systemic demands may also impact mentor identity. Many consider themselves primarily as teachers of pupils rather than supporters of beginning teachers’ learning (Jaspers *et al.* 2014). This is often a consequence of policy measures of accountability, placing schools and teachers under continual pressure to ensure pupils meet academic standards. They can therefore be more concerned with pupil progress than supporting beginning teachers’ learning, and thus averse to allowing mentees to take pedagogical risks. The concern with performativity can also negatively affect the care taken in mentor selection, mentors’ time for observations and feedback, and their willingness to attend training to upskill practice (Jones and Straker 2006, Hobson *et al.* 2009, Hobson and Malderez 2013, Thornton, 2014). Hobson and Malderez (*ibid*) argue that national policies also contribute to low mentor status as there is an absence of recognised career progression in this role and a lack of common understanding about what mentoring should entail. Whilst the National Mentoring Standards (DfE 2016b) may be a step in the right direction, White *et al.* (2015) have reported a lack of support for school based teacher educators (teachers in schools with responsibility for school-led ITE training) in terms of resources, time and training.

Viewing mentoring as a situated and social practice, Kemmis *et al.* (2014) provide a theoretical framework for conceptualising the enablers and constraints of effective practice. Their ‘practice architectures’ framework comprises of three elements: (1) actions and activities (doings), understood in terms of (2) relevant ideas in characteristic discourses (sayings), and (3) the characteristic relationships (relatings) in which the people are distributed (p.155). Kemmis *et al.* (2014) argue that these three elements, which are also referred to as (1) material-economic arrangements (doings), (2) cultural-discursive arrangements (sayings), and (3) social-political arrangements (relatings), that are found in or brought to a site, prefigure and shape mentoring practices.

Cultural-discursive arrangements, in the dimension of semantic space, relate to how mentoring is understood and expressed. For example, it may be thought of and spoken about as: supervision (with a focus on achievement of statutory teacher competences, taking a behaviourist approach), support (provision of professional guidance with both reflective and humanistic emphases), or collaborative self-development (taking an inquiry stance from the perspectives of both mentor and mentee). Material-economic arrangements, in the dimension of physical space-time, relate to the resources found in or brought to a site in which mentoring activity is enacted. This may include recognised time in the mentor’s workload allocation for carrying out her/his role and the place in the school in which mentoring occurs. The social-political arrangements constitute role relationships in a social space between mentor and mentee, e.g. If the mentor has a gatekeeper or assessor role, s/he may hold power over the mentee. There is also consideration of the democratic aspects or the extent of participant-centredness in the relationship.

## **Methodology**

### ***Research design and methods***

The enquiry involved a two-step, mixed methods ‘sequential explanatory design’ (Creswell 1996). Quantitative data were collected to identify emerging trends which were further explored through qualitative data collection to help explain the results obtained in the first phase (Ivankova *et al.* 2006). Phase 1 involved an online survey (n=46), and phase 2 involved semi-structured interviews (n=7). The survey was based on an instrument used in an EU funded TISSNTE (Teacher Induction: Supporting the Supporters of Novice Teachers) project (Jones 2009), adapted for the purposes of the study. It contained Likert scale questions about the importance attached to various mentoring activities, confidence in performing these, and views about mentoring opportunities and challenges. Phase 1 of the study took place in the summer term of 2016. The two phases were connected in the intermediate stage when the results of the survey data analysis guided data collection in the interviews (Ivankova *et al.* 2006), conducted in summer 2017. Further detail about the interview schedule will be provided in the analysis section below.

### ***Sample***

The survey was completed by mentors (n=64) supporting ITE programmes associated with an HE provider in the North of England. Participants were recruited by email invitation sent to co-ordinating mentors in partner schools, who were also asked to forward the survey link to their colleagues. Whilst mentors in secondary and primary schools were more or less evenly represented within the sample, many more female mentors (n=55) participated than males (n=9). 46 of the respondents supported mentees

on ‘university-led’ programmes (72% of the sample) and 18 supported mentees on ‘school-led’ programmes (28%). Although the researchers tried hard to gain a sample broadly representative of the distribution of those supporting students on different types of ITE programmes within the institution, (55% university-led and 45% school-led in the academic year that the study took place), a greater number of mentors supporting students on university-led courses ultimately responded.

In the second phase, opportunity sampling was adopted. Particular care was taken to recruit participants who would more evenly represent the different types of ITE programme and age phases in the HEI’s partner schools. The interviews lasted between 30 minutes and 1 hour and were conducted by the different members of the author team. Table 1 provides details of these demographics in addition to the mentors’ gender.

	Age phase	Gender	School-led ITE programme	University- led ITE programme	Both ITE programme types in school
Mentor 1	Secondary	Female			
Mentor 2	Primary	Female			
Mentor 3	Primary	Male			
Mentor 4	Primary	Male			
Mentor 5	Secondary	Male			
Mentor 6	Secondary	Male			
Mentor 7	Secondary	Male			

Table 1. Profile of interviewees

### *Analysis*

Phase 1 analysis involved the investigation of descriptive statistics and correlations between attachments to different ITE programmes and the age phase of the school with other survey items. These results were then analysed in light of the literature reviewed above, although at this stage, the process did not explicitly draw on Kemmis *et al.*'s (2014) framework.

The Phase 1 data suggested that the reasons for a variance in views may be related to the *locus* of the mentor. Since Kemmis *et al.*'s (2014) framework places emphasis on mentoring as a *situated* (emphasis added) practice, we considered it to be a helpful theoretical lens in Phase 2. In the second phase, we were interested in exploring whether shifting policy at the macro level was resulting in divergent practice architectures at school level that subsequently affected mentors' views and work. In seeking data relating to cultural-discursive arrangements, interviewees were asked about the influence of school culture and accountability measures. They were also questioned about how mentoring was resourced (material-economic arrangements) and the nature of their relationships with mentees (social-political arrangements).

In the first round of the transcript analysis, the data were coded manually using the three *a priori* strands of the practice architecture framework. Emerging sub categories were identified within each element in the second round, which were, in part, grounded in the data itself, and in part informed by issues raised in the literature review above.

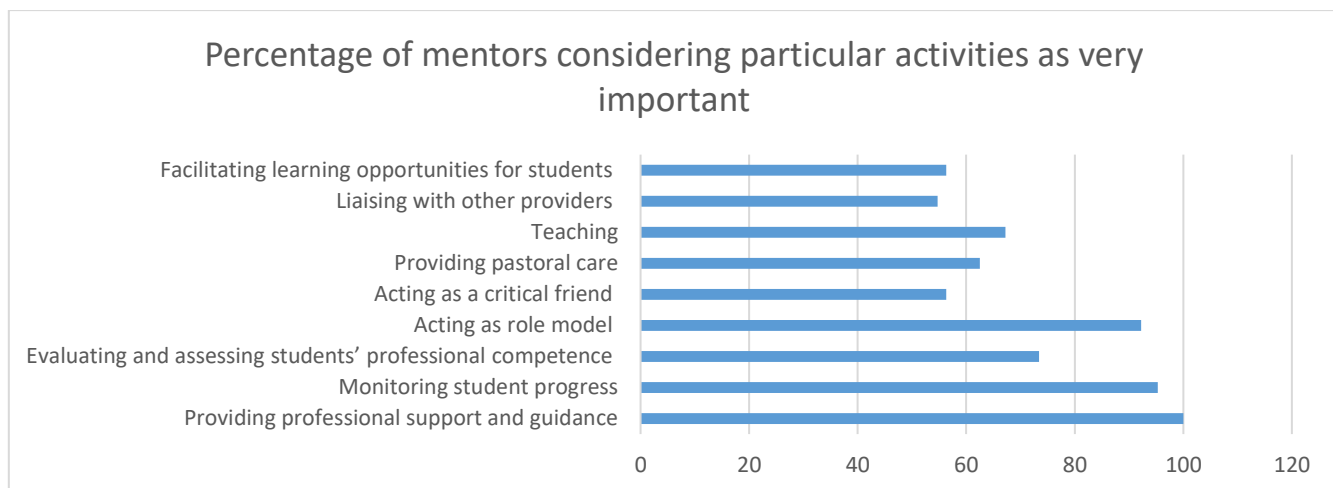
In deliberating which data set to prioritise in the integration and interpretation of the data from the two phases (Ivankova *et al.* 2006), priority was given to the qualitative data. The main reason for this was that although the purpose of the enquiry was to broadly identify how mentors understand and carry out their work, the main focus became to explain the factors that affect their views and practices.

## Results and analysis

### *Phase 1*

Figure 1 indicates that mentors rated the ‘provision of professional support and guidance’ as the most important mentoring activity, followed by ‘monitoring student progress’, and ‘acting as a role model’ in third position. ‘Facilitating learning opportunities’ (as part of their professional development) and ‘liaising with other providers’ were the activities that mentors rated as least important. Whilst this data may suggest some humanistic elements (Sündli 2007), it would also imply that mentors view their roles as more directive than collaborative, alluding to the predominance of hierarchical power structures in schools (Aderibigbe *et al.* 2016) and an ITT rather than an ITE model. It is also apparent that mentors consider themselves to play an important part in the ‘qualification’ process of beginning teachers (Biesta 2009, in Ulvik *et al.* 2018). The lower ratings of other activities may suggest that mentors view their work to be confined to a bounded context, namely, their own teaching and learning domains, thereby contributing to an organisational model of professionalism, rather than situating and connecting their work to broader professional knowledge required for occupational professionalism (Evetts 2009, in Davies *et al.* 2016). Mutton *et al.* (2017) emphasise how in high quality ITE models, beginning teachers are encouraged to draw on different sources and interrogate each in light of one another. The lesser importance attached to the facilitation of learning opportunities could also suggest lower regard for the mentor’s role in ‘socialisation’ (Biesta 2009, in Ulvik *et al.* 2018).

Figure 1. Percentage of mentors considering particular activities as very important



In response to the question asking to choose the top three possible benefits of mentoring, development of reflective practice received the most votes (ticked by 24% respondents) followed by personal / professional fulfilment (ticked by 19%). The most highly rated factors that challenged their work were workload / available time (ticked by 81%) (see Hobson and Malderez 2013) and dealing with weak or underachieving students (ticked by 48%). These results suggest that enablers for mentoring are personal to the mentor whilst the principal constraint is structural. Whilst weak students can provide mentors with an array of challenges, one of these can be related to the pressures teachers are under for their own pupils to make progress (Jaspers *et al.* 2014). If the teaching of student teachers is not 'up to standard', the risk of pupil underachievement is increased. However, the teachers employed in the school must carry responsibility for this, which is likely to result in a more directive mentoring approach.

An investigation of correlations between importance and confidence attached to mentoring activities and programme type, gender, and age phase of school revealed that most divergent views occurred in relation to programme type and importance of mentoring activities. This is evident in Figure 2, which illustrates that mentors supporting student teachers on school-led programmes considered seven out of the nine

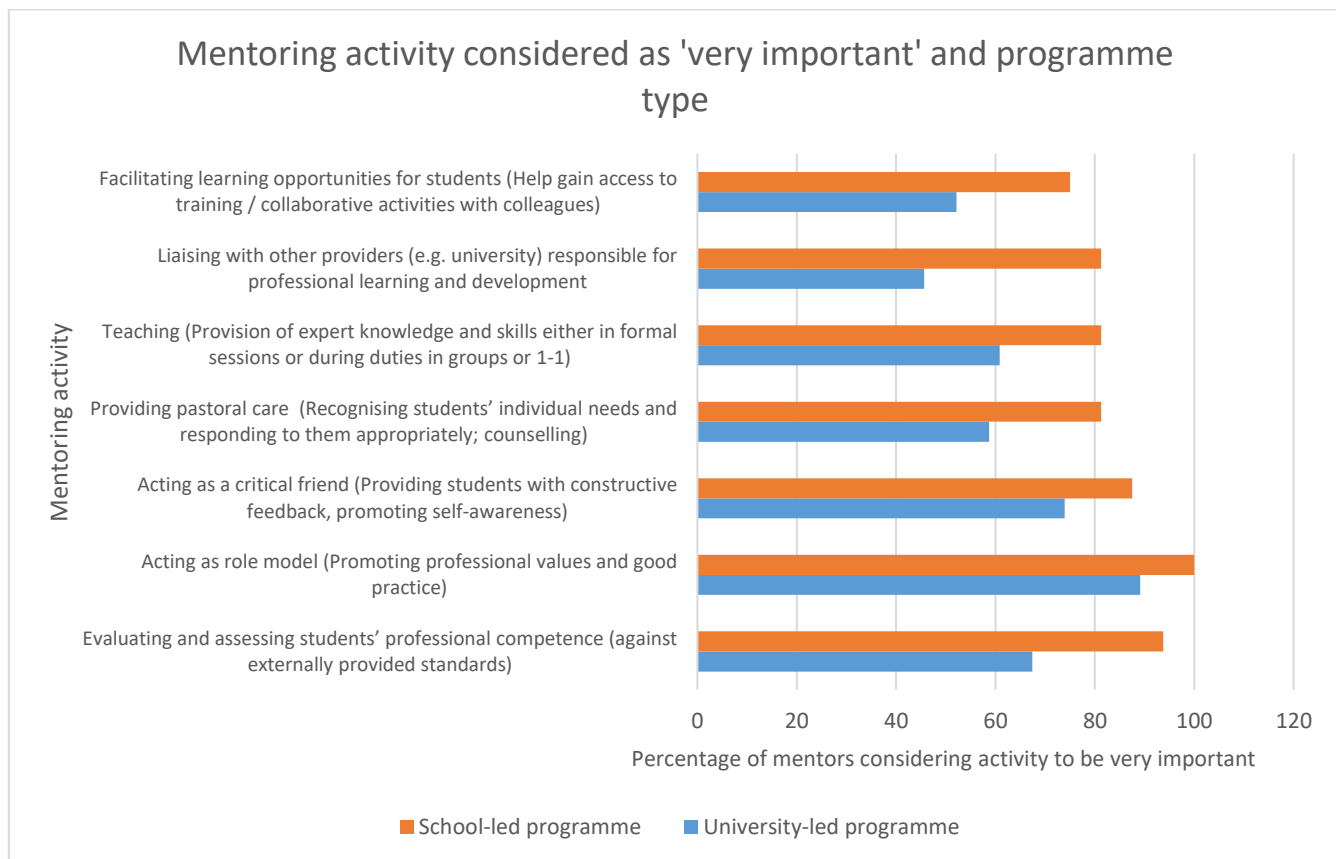


mentoring activities to be more important than those supporting university-led programmes. This could suggest that mentors on school-led programmes feel more responsible or accountable in their roles now that they have more ownership of ITE programmes. This is possibly due to the accountability culture (O'Neill 2002) that pervades English schools, now permeating another level in the system.

The markedly different views about the importance of two mentoring activities could give further weight to this interpretation. 94% of mentors supporting students on school-led programmes considered evaluating and assessing students' professional competence to be very important compared to 67% of mentors supporting students on university-led courses. Liaising with other providers was considered very important by 81% of school-led programme mentors compared to 47% of university-led programme mentors. The former result may imply that school-led programme mentors feel greater responsibility for 'gatekeeping' to the profession if the school has more ITE ownership, especially if there is an expectation within the School Direct consortium to recruit the student teacher to one of the consortium schools. The latter result may be the consequence of the need for school-led ITE providers to pay more attention to, and take responsibility for, the logistics of the training course, which although 'school-led', still requires collaboration with universities for the academically accredited aspects of the course and quality assurance of the student placement. Mutton *et al.* (2017, pp. 26-27) remark how the new ITE landscape represents 'a missed opportunity to move beyond administrative conceptions of partnership that focus predominantly on organisational structures to exemplify, or even specify, how the different contributions to trainee teachers' learning through ITT programmes could be brought together'.

There were not any notable differences between these two sets of mentors with regard to confidence in practising these activities.

Figure 2. Mentoring activity considered as very important and programme type



The age phase of the school also seemed to impact on some views. Acting as a role model was considered to be more important by primary school mentors, 97% of whom rated this as very important compared to 86% secondary school mentors. This is possibly due to primary school teachers taking a strong role model persona in their everyday practice, where they are the main contact person for children during the school day (See and Arthur 2011). There were some stark differences in views relating to mentor confidence in evaluating/assessing mentees' professional competence. 68% of secondary mentors were very confident compared to 35% of primary mentors. Perhaps this is because most secondary school teachers are required to continually assess pupils' work using externally set criteria in order to prepare them for public examinations in

subject specialisms. In primary schools, this responsibility lies principally in the hands of those teaching the oldest pupils.

## ***Phase 2***

The findings from phase 2 are presented using Kemmis *et al.*'s (2014) framework as an organising device. Each of the framework dimensions is broken down into sub sections influenced by emerging themes from the data and, where appropriate, perspectives from complementary research literature. The following letters are used to indicate the programme type mentors supported and age phase of the school in which they worked: SL = school-led, U = university-led, B = both school-led and university-led, S = secondary, P = primary.

### *Cultural-discursive arrangements*

*Cultural-discursive arrangements of accountability:* All interviewees talked about a culture in their schools that was in some way influenced by the policy context of accountability, i.e. the need to demonstrate pupil progress through statutory assessment and Ofsted scrutiny. (Ofsted is the Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills in England that inspects services providing education and skills for learners of all ages.) In schools where there was less confidence about 'good' or 'outstanding' assessment results or Ofsted judgements, pressures to demonstrate pupil progress seemed to negatively influence mentoring practices. As interviewee 2 (U,P) explained, 'You're giving these students your class so they've got to have the right advice and the coaching to make sure those children actually progress while they're teaching'. These comments suggest that the mentor was telling the mentee what to do, taking a supervision or behaviourist approach, whereby learning is understood as a process of transmission. This data implies that, due to the high-stakes assessment

culture, the mentor faces challenges in reconciling the need for her pupils to make progress with supporting beginning teachers' learning (Jasper et al., 2014). The high gamble associated with mentee trial and error was also highlighted by interviewee 7 (B, S), who felt it was important to 'give immediate feedback to make sure there's no replication of any errors in the subsequent lessons.' In fact, this mentor seemed to equate teacher learning directly with pupil progress: 'As I say, my priority really is the students and making sure that they're okay to teach the actual pupils. And by focusing on them [the pupils] explicitly, I think it helps the trainees to naturally improve'. The fact that the mentor's feedback needed to be 'immediate' and had a focus on ironing out errors suggests that there has been limited time for a reflective and participant-centred discussion (Feiman-Nemser 2012).

The range of learning opportunities that mentors can provide also seems affected by the culture of accountability. Interviewee 5's (B,S) comments reflect a common issue, i.e. lack of opportunities for mentees to teach classes sitting public examinations: 'As soon as there are external pressures on the school, the management are very quick to push trainee teachers away from what they perceive to be high priority groups' (B, S). This indicates systemic demands that come from superiors (Schatz-Oppenheimer 2017).

Contrastingly, when schools are lauded in an accountability process, mentoring practices seem to be positively impacted, permitting the mentee more autonomy. Interviewee 4 (SL, P) told how in his school, which received an 'outstanding' Ofsted judgement, their 'flexibility allows the students the space and the teachers the confidence to say 'give it a try''. Here, the mentee was also allowed to work with the Year 6 class that was taking the compulsory end of primary school standardised

attainment tests (SATs). He felt it was important to ‘include them in the process and understanding of what the children and teachers are going through during testing and the lead up to it’. Similarly, interviewee 3 (SL, P) reported how in their ‘last Ofsted we got ‘outstanding’ so we are in a really lucky position that we can take risks, play about and make our own choices [...] So as a mentor, I very much encourage the students to do that if they have the nuts and bolts solid’.

Interestingly, in both of the schools that received high Ofsted grades (both were primary schools which supported school-led programmes), there seemed to be a strong ‘learning community’ culture (Cochran-Smith and Lytle 1999), where colleagues supported one another for the sake of whole school development. It should be noted that an ‘outstanding’ Ofsted judgement was a condition for becoming a lead school in a ‘School Direct’ (school-led) consortium (DfE, 2014). Interviewee 4 (SL, P) explained how ‘We have a school ethos of ‘the communal brain’ in that if you are struggling with a decision or task or a difficult activity then you share with a colleague and have a conversation. There are not many things we do here entirely alone and that is very much the culture.’ Here we notice how the cultural and situational features of the placement setting (Ambrosetti and Dekkers 2010) impact on practice. The learning community culture seemed also, however, to be positively reinforced by ITE ownership.

*Cultural-discursive arrangements of ITE ownership:* In phase 1, the findings suggested a correlation between the importance attached to mentoring and programme type, with mentors supporting school-led programmes seemingly taking their responsibilities more seriously. As previously mentioned, this could imply a double burden of accountability. However, the interview data indicated cultural-discursive arrangements of ‘ITE ownership’, which were beneficial. Whilst a strong learning community culture in the

schools may have existed prior to school-led ITE engagement, it seemed that this culture was being further enhanced and developed through ITE ownership.

Interviewee 4 (SL, P) described how he encouraged and involved other colleagues to maximise learning opportunities, which facilitated the student teachers' socialisation (Biesta 2009 in Ulvik *et al.* 2018) into the 'community of practice (Lave and Wenger 1991): 'we all have the responsibility to create the whole teacher'. He also explained how senior members of staff lent their support and how student teachers were encouraged to participate in and learn from whole school issues:

Now that we are 3 or 4 years into School Direct, I think what is really good, is that a lot of the leadership members of staff know who the School Direct trainees are, and are happy for them to observe or come and ask questions. And we operate very much an open door policy with them. Also, in staff meetings or INSET we have an inclusive policy and trainees are included in training and resources and handouts.

Mentors supporting student teachers on school-led programmes also seemed incentivised in their work by 'vested interests', namely, employing the student teachers they trained after they had qualified (Matthews and Berwick 2013). Three of the interviewees commented on this, all of whom were involved in supporting school-led routes. As one remarked, 'If you have a school driving the partnership then it must become more beneficial as you may end up employing someone from it, and therefore it must be mutually beneficial. If you are driving it, then you are not just providing lip service and ticking boxes' (SL, P). It seems that for this mentor, the purpose of mentoring is to 'grow her own' teachers, which although advantageous in many respects, may be at odds with preparing new teachers for life in the profession in the broader sense.

*Cultural-discursive arrangements of 'distributed mentoring' in primary schools:* The survey data suggested that cultural-discursive arrangements may also be influenced by the age phase of the school. The interview data insinuated that different approaches to mentoring could be related to contrasting logistical set ups and thinking about education. Interviewee 3 (SL, P) claimed that he and his colleagues formed one mentoring 'team' whereby 'all colleagues can share knowledge, expertise and advice'. This model chimes with the suggestions of Long (2009) who recommends that distributed mentoring carried out by a pool of mentors is the best way to support student teachers. By contrast, interviewee 1 (U, S), a secondary mentor, explained that the mentee was most likely to receive support only from herself or other subject colleagues, which was a reflection of the fragmented way in which subject departments worked in secondary schools. Interviewee 2 (U, P) implied that the more holistic approach taken to a child's education in primary schools was also replicated in mentoring: 'The ethos of this school is that it's the whole person that we deal with'. Responsibility for mentoring in the primary schools was therefore not only distributed amongst colleagues, but appears to be 'distributed' in terms of emphases on both professional and pastoral elements.

#### *Material-economic arrangements*

*Material-economic arrangements of bureaucracy:* The 'doings' of mentoring at school level were clearly influenced by aspects of the practice architecture at the national level, i.e. the requirement to collect evidence against the Teachers' Standards for the award of Qualified Teacher Status (QTS). Thus, many mentor meetings involved attention to bureaucratic requirements, or 'qualification' (Biesta 2009 in Ulvik *et al.* 2018), where

evidence for the Teachers' Standards was reviewed, or they were used to set the agenda for future development.

Nonetheless, all interviewees expressed positive views about the structure of the Teachers' Standards and the related target setting as they felt that these provided a framework for their work. Interviewee 5 (B, S), however, recognised potential limitations, noting susceptibility to 'tick box[es], because it needs to be done and out of the way'. Whilst the tick box approach did not seem to dominate for most, we note here how the material-economic arrangements of documenting and assessing prescribed standards of performance, create potential for a controlling and managerialist approach, rather than collaborative self-development (Kemmis *et al.* 2014) that is more person-centred. Whilst a formalised weekly meeting in an office or quiet classroom was the preferred 'space-time medium' (Kemmis *et al.* 2014) to attend to the required paperwork, all mentors commented about the value of additional more ad hoc and informal mentoring. This type of mentoring, which avoids documenting and reporting, arguably has greater capacity for participant-centredness. Nonetheless, the amount of time resource available to mentors for such practice varied widely.

*Material-economic arrangements of time:* Interviewee 1 (U, S) explained that in order to carry out her teaching and mentoring responsibilities, 'I was essentially without a free [lesson] for four weeks'. Interviewee 6 (U, S) claimed that his school had not allocated any protected time and that he even had to 'fight' for one lesson per week for mentoring. Other interviewees claimed to be mentoring in their own time at the end of the school day (see Hobson and Malderez 2013).

Interviewees 3 and 4, however, who were both located in schools involved with school-led provision, were more generously resourced with time. As interviewee 4



remarked, 'They give me the time which is good. I know that when I talk to colleagues in other schools who are involved in School Direct, we all agree that not having time being given by the school is when the mentoring or placement does not work'. This data would suggest that there is a relationship between cultural-discursive and material-economic arrangements. Where mentoring is thought of and talked about as support for teacher professional learning, sufficient time resource, an essential element for moving beyond supervision and bureaucratic modes of action, is provided.

*Material-economic arrangements of school-university partnership:* School-led provision also involves working with universities since schools, with the exception of 'School Centred Initial Teacher Training' (SCITTs), do not have accreditation powers for awarding QTS. The material-economic arrangements of this partnership also seems to affect the 'doings' of mentoring.

The survey revealed that overall, respondents rated 'liaising with other providers' (which predominantly relates to work with universities) to be least important compared to all the other mentoring activities. However, as noted in the findings from Phase 1, there was wide variation in opinion between mentors supporting school-led and university-led courses.

The interview data suggested that this difference was most likely to be related to the perceived need of school-led providers to take more responsibility for course management, course logistics and mentee progress towards the Teachers' Standards. This echoes Mutton *et al.*'s (2017) prediction that under School Direct, partnership working may focus more on bureaucracy rather than the complementary contributions that both schools and universities have to make to professional learning. Whilst interviewees 5 (B, S) and 6 (U, S) were interested in learning more about the university

taught aspects of the course, (and the timing of these), in order to be able to join up the different elements of professional learning, interviewee 7 (B, S) saw the ‘spelling out of roles and responsibilities of the mentor and the liaison tutor by the university [to be] sufficient’. He did not think that there was time available for collaborative curriculum development. In spite of a policy focus that places more responsibility on schools for teacher preparation, and the fact that this mentor works in a school that mainly focuses on school-led training, his point of view is representative of a ‘separatist’ model (Furlong *et al.* 2000). In this model, there is a clear division of labour for university and school staff, rather than collaborative working on the pedagogy and curriculum of ITE. Following this model, the mentor is less likely to take an active role in facilitating the joining up of theory and practice (Smith *et al.* 2006).

Given that a partnership is a two-way relationship, it is also important to consider the factors that may impinge on closer collaborative curriculum planning from the university perspective. Like schools, universities that provide ITE are subject to rigorous Ofsted inspections and, in the shift towards more school-centred ITE, are at risk of being closed down if they are judged to be less than ‘good’ (DfE 2019). Whilst the quality of partnership is an important criterion in an Ofsted inspection, there is no explicit mention of the need for mentors to connect theory and practice and there are several other criteria informing a judgment (Ofsted 2018). Consequently, collaborative curriculum development with schools may not be at the top of a university’s priorities. If mentors, however, are to take on more responsibility for professional learning that involves the reconciliation of practical and theoretical knowledge, schools and universities will need to consider liaising in different ways. The data here would imply that the material-economic arrangements in this particular school-university partnership

currently fall short of supporting mentors in fulfilling broader teacher educator roles (European Commission 2013).

### *Social-political arrangements*

*Humanistic social-political relatings:* Three of the interviewees considered one of their key functions to be that of support. They valued trusting relationships and taking a ‘whole person’ approach. Interviewee 3 (SL, P) commented that ‘the biggest influence is relationships. As a mentor, the first thing I always try and do is to make them see they have my backing and that I am there for them, rather than to purely judge or assess them’. Similarly, interviewee 1 (U, S) remarked how ‘if there's not trust then there's not really any way to move forward’. She stressed the importance of ‘understanding the person, not just the role of teaching, you need to know more about them’. Her views echoed those of interviewee 2 (U, P), who felt that ‘it comes back to that pastoral, I think you’ve got to unpick a person and find out what their strengths and weaknesses’. Whilst these comments collectively point to respectful and healthy relationships, it is possible that this humanistic emphasis detracts from promoting criticality or an inquiry orientation (Cochran-Smith and Lytle 2009). This is evident in the remarks made by interviewee 5 (B, S):

I stay in the area of support because it’s the one I am most comfortable with, I like to help people rather than being critical. I personally use support before anything else.

This mentor seems to consider being ‘critical’ as wholly negative, possibly overlooking the value of depersonalised criticality. Interviewee 1 (U, S) also seemed unfamiliar with a more positive view of criticality since she was unfamiliar with the term ‘critical friend’, asking: ‘When you say a ‘critical friend’, what do you mean by that?’ As far as social-political arrangements are concerned, these four mentors seem to take a

‘parental’ approach without exerting dominance. The fact that they work in both primary and secondary schools, and support mentees on different types of programmes, suggests that across a variety of settings, mentoring continues to be understood as a humanistic and nurturing activity (Rogers, 1974 in Sündli 2007).

*Social-political relatings in a learning community:* Interestingly, there appeared to be slightly different power dynamics in relationships in the two primary schools, which ran school-led ITE and where strong learning communities had been established.

Interviewees 3 (SL, P) and 4 (SL, P) talked about collaborative partnerships (Feiman-Nemser 1998, 2012, Earl and Timperley 2008) whereby both parties developed professionally. The mentees seemed to be on more of an equal footing, rather than taken ‘under the mentor’s wing’. As interviewee 4 explained, ‘they are members of staff so I have exactly the same relationship with the trainees as I do with all of my teacher colleagues.’ In his school, the students were part of ‘the communal brain’ which emphasised the importance of sharing knowledge and expertise to become better teachers. His school had established a system of peer coaching, involving triads of colleagues planning and teaching together to help develop new skills and understanding. ‘This culture quickly passes to the trainees and they understand we are all learning together all of the time.’

Interviewee 4 (SL, P) explained how he and his mentee collaboratively approached problem solving: ‘If a student comes with ‘I cannot get child X to focus’ then we will unpick that together and look at both the student [teacher]’s and my practice. They might suggest something and together we will develop an idea to make that child more engaged in their learning.’ He was of the opinion that the school ‘sees

the bigger picture very much in terms of trainees' and RQTs' (recently qualified teachers) contributing to moving the school forward.'

It can be observed here how schools which have received positive Ofsted judgements, have the confidence and 'head space' to direct their own professional learning in an experimental way that focuses on a broad range of issues. It seems that in these schools, social-political relatings are more collaborative and democratic, allowing for transformative learning.

## **Discussion and conclusion**

Returning to our first research question (How do mentors conceptualise their roles and describe their work?), the survey suggested that mentors see themselves predominantly in supporting and monitoring roles. However, the interviews revealed that this broad trend is somewhat simplistic. Mentors located in different schools explained how contrasting contextual factors influenced their work. Thus, a more detailed answer to the first research question also requires consideration of the data relating to questions two (concerning the enablers and constrainers of practice) and three (regarding the influence of ITE programme affiliation or other contextual factors).

With regard to research question three, we discovered that school specific and national policy factors intersected. School specific factors included whether it was a primary or secondary school, the strength of a learning community culture, and whether the school was a provider of school-led ITE. In the schools of two interviewees in phase 2, the latter two characteristics overlapped.

Influential policy factors related to accountability measures, manifested in Ofsted inspections of both school and ITE providers, and the Teachers' Standards. In

England, education is commonly evaluated in terms of standards of academic performance. When young people do not reach competitive standards, fault is found with the quality of teaching or the nature of the curriculum. In an attempt to rectify this, policy makers have implemented systems of monitoring and regulation of curriculum and assessment (O'Neill 2002). Against this policy backdrop, mentors all too often consider the mentee's experimentation through trial and error, which enables the beginning teacher to learn from enquiry and to develop their own professional identity (Ulvik *et al.* 2018), to run the risk of impeding the progress of the students they teach (Jaspers *et al.* 2014).

When subjected to such performativity agendas, the cultural-discursive arrangements of mentoring are more likely to result in the supervision of mentee practices that conform with mentors' or their superiors' pre-conceived ideas of 'what works' to achieve the 'best' results (Hobson and Malderez 2013). In this situation, mentors are under the pressure of systemic demands (Schatz-Oppenheimer 2017). The requirement of student teachers to evidence behaviours articulated in the Teachers' Standards and of mentors to vet and assess this evidence, i.e. focussing on 'qualification' (Biesta 2009, in Ulvik *et al.* 2018), is another reason why mentoring is thought of and talked about by some as monitoring and supervision. Whilst mentors did not explicitly express accountability measures as a constraint in their work, the data implies that these hinder the inquiry and constructivist approach advocated by Cochran-Smith and Lytle (2009) and Feiman-Nemser (2012).

The overlap of practice architectures at the national and local levels (i.e. the intersection of policy and school specific factors), however, can also have a positive impact on mentoring. It seems that schools which lead ITE provision are thinking and talking about mentoring in a way that moves beyond supervision. The data indicated

that in these schools, student teachers were more likely to be socialised into and regarded as serious participants in the learning community (Ulvik *et al.* 2018; Long 2009) in which there is a whole school culture that emphasises the benefits of critical reflection on practice. It is worth remembering at this stage, however, that the survey found that mentors supporting school-led routes considered the assessment of student teachers' professional competence to be much more important than those supporting university routes, suggesting that the progress of student teachers on school-led routes is monitored more closely. It could be the case that socialisation into the learning community, therefore, may be partly conditional on meeting expected standards rather than a *sine qua non*. The 'wobble room' provided for mentee trial and error in these schools is also likely to be the result of favourable inspection outcomes. Schools entrusted with school-led provision are those that have been judged favourably by Ofsted. Favourable inspection judgements result in decreased teacher anxiety about pupil progress which arguably allow for more flexibility.

We have also learnt that cultural-discursive, material-economic and social-political arrangements at school level are interrelated. When beginning teacher learning was central to the cultural-discursive arrangements, it was more richly resourced with time and human capital. Cultural-discursive arrangements which emphasise teacher learning (which was strong in two schools that led ITE programmes) also affected social-political arrangements. Here mentors reported collaborative learning and relationships that were more democratic.

So does the practice architecture in school-led ITE better complement the type of mentoring favoured by more recent theoretical models? To some extent, the findings reported above would suggest that the answer is yes. However, caution is required in drawing this conclusion, not only due to the small-scale nature of the study, but also due

to a host of other issues. In the first instance, it must be recognised that only schools that meet certain criteria – namely, those that have an ‘outstanding’ or ‘good’ Ofsted judgement - are permitted to be the ‘lead school’ in School Direct consortia (DfE 2018). (A lead school co-ordinates placement provision in other schools in its consortium and is responsible for elements of training outside the classroom.) It is unclear whether mentoring in school-led ITE programmes is a closer match to a collaborative self-development model due to a learning community culture that has contributed to the ‘outstanding’ grade, has come about due to confidence following the grade, or is one that has been reinforced and further developed by consequence of ITE ownership. This type of mentoring could also be influenced by a combination of these factors. The point to be stressed here, is that mentoring of the collaborative self-development type is more likely to take place in schools who have ‘earned autonomy’ (Hargreaves 2003), with freedom to move beyond curriculum prescription and teaching and learning orientated around test performance. Not all schools in England are privileged to be in this position. Furthermore, Ofsted judgements are subject to change following further inspections. Thus, a school can lose permission to lead ITE provision. Davies et al. (2016) heed caution here, pointing out that in these circumstances, ITE can become biased towards the needs of ‘successful’ schools.

We should also critically consider the inquiry style learning described by some mentors. Whilst it was evident that some considered their role to involve collaborative problem solving, none of the interviewees made reference to the application of theoretical or research knowledge in searching for solutions. This ‘absent’ finding converges with the finding from the survey, which indicated that mentors across the board considered their more situated roles, i.e. providing professional guidance, monitoring progress and acting as a role model, to be most important. This mitigates



against internationally recognised high quality models of ITE that enable the integration of research-based and practical knowledge (Mutton *et al.* 2017). It also suggests that the mentors in this study have not yet been able to meet some of the National Mentoring Standards (DfE 2016b).

So has the role of the mentor changed in an increasingly school-led English initial teacher education policy context? From our data, we could tentatively conclude that it has broadly changed in a positive way. However, it is difficult to say whether shifting governance of ITE to schools has brought this about, or whether it is a positive spin-off of broader accountability measures discussed above. What is clear, nonetheless, is the positive influence of a strong school learning community on mentoring and how particular practice architectures at school level can facilitate these.

As far as future mentor development is concerned, therefore, it seems logical to recommend that it is situated within schools' broader agenda of professional and school development. The advantages are manifold; as Sukru Bellibas *et al.* (2007) highlight, strong professional learning communities have not only proven to be advantageous for teacher effectiveness, but also for student achievement. Rather than dealing with beginning teacher mentoring separately, teacher learning for colleagues with all levels of experience should be a whole school responsibility. This would align well with the 'distributed mentoring' that was evident in some of the primary school survey data and resonates with calls from Long (2009) and Cherian (2007) for the need for pools of mentors within schools.

With regard to the future of school and university partnerships, in particular in relation to school-led programmes, there is a strong case for colleagues to work more collaboratively on mentor development and ITE curriculum. We would strongly argue

against a conception of partnership with an administrative focus, which was cautioned by Mutton *et al.* (2017) as a possible outcome in a school-led policy context. We suggest that mentor training and ITE curriculum design should be a collaborative endeavour, led by both school and university colleagues, with responsibilities playing to the strengths of their respective institutions. University colleagues could focus on familiarising mentors with theoretical and research knowledge, whilst school colleagues could promote coaching skills that draw on professional craft and contextual knowledge. Joined up working in this way should also facilitate conversations about a more coherent curriculum experience that joins the university and workplace domains.

In order for these two-pronged recommendations to be translated into practice, there are financial implications for policy makers. Schools' professional development budgets would need extending to fund the preparation of a greater number of teacher mentors to support both pre-service and in-service professional learning within the profession. Whilst some mentor development may take place in-house, schools will also need to also ear-mark funding to release designated individuals to work collaboratively with university colleagues on mentor development and the ITE curriculum. In other words, mentors who make a substantial contribution to cohering professional learning that straddles the workplace and university domains need clearly defined workload relief for this crucial work.

We acknowledge, of course, that mentor development for both school-led and university-led partnerships, should also attend to an array of additional factors (e.g. the development of mentoring pedagogies and the need to rely less on mentors' instincts and intuitions (Martin 1996, Jones and Straker 2006, Orland-Barak and Hasin 2010, Jaspers *et al.* 2014). However, the findings from this study, which uncover perceptions about the role of the mentor and the factors which influence these in an increasingly

school-led ITE policy context, shed new light on the field of mentor development needs and the types of practice architectures that will support best practice.

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Table 1. Profile of interviewees

Figure 1. Percentage of mentors considering particular activities as very important

Figure 2. Mentoring activity considered as very important and programme type