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We will take them from anywhere: schools working within multiple initial teacher training partnerships

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“We will take them from anywhere” – schools working within multiple initial teacher training partnerships.

INTRODUCTION (1)

Although informal partnership between schools and higher education institutions (HEIs) has been an important feature of initial teacher training (ITT) in England for many years, it was not until the implementation of government circulars 9/92 for secondary (DfE 1992) and 14/93 for primary (DfE 1993) that there was a statutory requirement for HEIs to enter into formal partnership arrangements with schools, with the expectation that they would “exercise a joint responsibility for the planning and management of courses and the selection, training and assessment of students” (DfE 1992, paragraph 14). The exact nature of the partnerships that have developed since the legislation, continue to be researched and documented (most recently Brisard et al. 2005, Smith et al. 2006). Furthermore the issue of partnership between HEIs and schools has been the focus of a significant amount of research internationally, particularly in relation to the development of professional development schools in the United States (Holmes Group, 1990; Darling-Hammond, 1994; Bullough et al. 1997). We argue partnerships have now matured, and in practice many schools are now quietly seizing the initiative to work with a multiplicity of providers on their own terms.

In England, partnership requirements not only stated that HEIs were to have a closer relationship with schools but also defined, to a certain extent, what the nature of this new relationship would be in terms of the role and functions of each of the partners. The notion

of 'complementary partnership' Furlong et al. (2000) has been used to describe the way in which it was envisaged by the government that the two partners might work together: in such a model HEIs organise the overall programme, with their role being separate from, but complementary to, that of the school's. Since so much responsibility is devolved to schools there is the need from the HEI point of view for increasingly detailed information to be disseminated, a proliferation of paperwork which evidences a climate of intensified public accountability for ITT in England. A whole programme at a given HEI can be at risk of "non-compliance" if a single school partnership is ineffectively managed and the inspection of the management of Quality Assurance is deemed unsatisfactory.

This appears to be in contrast to a 'collaborative model', such as the Oxford Internship Scheme (Benton 1990), that had been developed by some HEIs and in which the student teachers' programme was jointly planned and delivered and where school and HEI were working together in an integrated fashion. However, the findings from the Modes of Teacher Education (MOTE) project indicated that what was actually in place in many partnerships was an 'HEI-led model' with a top-down approach characterized by a teacher training curriculum and its related assessment processes that are directed by the university. Again, quality assurance is identified as being a key feature of the HEI role and the documentation accompanying the programme is therefore 'strongly emphasized' (Furlong et al. 2000).

Problems associated with the recruitment and retention of teachers from the 1990s also led to the decision, taken initially by the Conservative government but continued by New Labour after 1997, to expand further the number of routes into teaching. This resulted in the development of, amongst others, a number of School Centred Initial Teacher Training

(SCITT) schemes, (which allowed consortia of schools to be funded directly for their own initial teacher training programmes), flexible Postgraduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) courses and the Graduate Teacher Programme, an employment-based route to Qualified Teacher Status (QTS) and that carried with it no academic qualification. As a result of these developments many schools were becoming increasingly involved in alternative routes into teaching, as well as continuing to be involved with HEI partners running more established undergraduate and postgraduate courses. However, there is also some evidence that schools were, at the time, seeing initial teacher training as yet another burden in terms of workload and, in the context of a growing culture of external inspection, a possible diversion from their core activity of teaching pupils (Griffiths & Owen, 1995b; Brisard et al, 2005) with the resulting difficulties for HEIs in securing enough high quality school places, particularly in some specific areas such as London. Government targets for increasing numbers of primary school teachers and demographic changes requiring more secondary teachers also led to HEI providers finding it difficult to obtain places, and it was in this context that the Teacher Training Agency (TTA)¹ launched the National Partnership Project, the twin aims of which were to develop capacity and quality in ITT in England. As a result of involvement in the project it has been noted that many colleagues in school 'developed a new commitment to school-based teacher education' (Furlong et al. 2006).

What is clear from the research literature is that partnership is nearly always examined from the HEI perspective – that is to say in terms of ITT providers working in partnership with a range of schools (for example, Williams (Ed), 1994; Griffiths & Owen, 1995a; Furlong et al., 2000). Quality and quantity issues in relation to ITT are politically sensitive, and partnerships can be prescribed in a context which can appear contrived and driven

more by external policies (and funding) than local imperatives. What appears to have been neglected is the notion of partnership in the context of one school working with a number of *different* providers. There are some studies (Windsor, 1995; Jones and Heilbronn, 1997) that do look at issues *from the school perspective* in relation to schools' attempts to consolidate ways of working with a number of different HEIs, but for the most part the notion of multiple partnerships with a single school at the centre has not been widely investigated. It was in this context that this research was carried out.

METHODS (1)

The study² set out to examine the role of the ITT coordinator³ in both primary and secondary schools in the context of one government designated region of England where ITT is focused predominantly on four HEIs, one of which is a distance learning provider. Two of the providers offer primary and secondary programmes; two offer secondary programmes only. The findings reported here focus on issues in terms of schools working in partnership with more than one, and in some cases several, ITT providers (although none of the schools in question was working within a School Centred Initial Teacher Training (SCITT) scheme).

The first stage of the data collection entailed examination of the documentation provided to the coordinators by the HEIs in question, focusing in particular on the way in which role and responsibilities of the ITT coordinator were outlined. This was followed by a questionnaire sent out to the ITT coordinator in 113 schools in the region (62 questionnaires sent to primary schools and 51 to secondary schools), with a response rate of 53%

(n=61). The sample of schools was selected by compiling a list of the schools in the region known to work in partnership with one or more of the four HEI providers and then selecting a proportion of these schools on a stratified random basis. The questionnaire covered a number of areas including the personal profile of the coordinator; the school profile (number of trainees and from which HEIs, school size, specialist status); the coordinator's perception of the role; the training and guidance received from the partner HEIs and any issues related to working within multiple partnerships; other roles undertaken within the school that are related to ITT Co-ordination; the responsibilities specific to working with trainees; the factors that might facilitate or constrain the role, the wider benefits of the role; and the way quality assurance in ITT is managed across the school.

The questionnaire included both open ended questions, as well as closed questions where the respondents were asked to select answers from a given list or, in one question, to give a rating to a statement on a scale. It was initially piloted with 4 secondary school coordinators and 3 from primary schools and as a result a number of adjustments to tone and clarity were made. The data were analyzed using quantitative and qualitative approaches, the latter involving the development of categories that were grounded in the data.

In seeking to explore further the understanding of the school coordinator role in ITT partnerships, a series of six 45 minute semi-structured telephone interviews were conducted with a sample of school coordinators, highlighting questions that had been drawn from an initial analysis of the questionnaire data. These interviews were audio recorded. The coordinators selected all worked in schools that had been identified as being actively involved in partnership with one or more HEIs and were nominated by

members of the research team (representing the four HEIs in the region). Each interview consisted of the same prompts, asked in the same order by the same interviewer and each audio recording was transcribed. The intention of the interviews was to explore firstly what the role involved, secondly how the role complemented other professional responsibilities of the ITT coordinator and thirdly what skills and knowledge were considered necessary for the effective implementation of the role, as well as the identification of any potential further training needs.

The data presented in this article focus on the experience of individual coordinators working with a range of different HEI providers.

FINDINGS (1)

The school's level of involvement in ITT (2)

The responses to the questionnaire indicated that the majority of schools are working with at least two HEI providers (see Table 1), although those working with at least three providers are likely to be secondary schools which perhaps is to be expected given the relative size of schools and the capacity of smaller schools to receive only a limited number of trainees. The fact that 52% of primary schools and 69% of all schools in the sample were working with more than one ITT provider indicates that this is a significant enough pattern to be worthy of further investigation.

[Insert Table 1]

The number of trainees that each school hosted in the academic year prior to the research being carried out also shows, as one might expect, that secondary schools have the capacity to take on greater numbers of trainees for longer periods of time, although one primary school reported taking on 21 trainees for a placement of 10 weeks or longer. Table II shows the distribution of trainees in the sample schools for both shorter and longer placements. The figures are necessarily determined to some extent by the pattern of school placements used by the ITT providers with whom the schools were working (for example the courses run by two of the HEIs in the region involve extended periods of time (the equivalent of 15+ weeks) in one school, whereas the other HEIs organise the trainees' time in school in shorter blocks of time).

[Insert Table II]

In addition to working with trainees from HEIs, ITT coordinators appear to be increasingly involved with the Graduate Teacher Programme (GTP), a work-based route into teaching in England which enables individuals to train to teach as employees of the school, rather than as students of an HEI, with their training coordinated by a Designated Recommending Body (DRB). 63% of secondary schools and 52% of primary schools were involved in the scheme and whilst a small number of schools reported involvement with 5 or more GTP trainees the more normal picture is of a school being involved with one or two such trainees (see Table III). In most cases these are in addition to, rather than in place of, the trainee teachers in the school coming from more traditional routes. More schools appear to be willing to accommodate a greater range of trainees, despite the different routes placing different demands on the schools providing the placements.

[Insert Table III]

The interview data indicated that primary schools, because of school size and established ways of working with individual HEIs, might be less willing to work with more than one provider. One coordinator stated:

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. [Primary coordinator]

In contrast the interviewees who represented secondary schools designated by the government as Training Schools (DfEE, 1999a; DfEE, 1999b) painted a different picture. These are schools where one would expect a more widespread engagement in ITT since they have received additional funding to support training activities and are required show evidence of significant levels of outreach work with a range of partners as part of this work. Interviewees from Training Schools provided evidence of a significant range of providers with whom the school was working (five or six each), and the sizeable number of trainees welcomed per year (ranging from 25+ to 40+). This higher figure even excludes, as coordinators admitted, placements related to other initiatives of the Teacher Training Agency such as the Student Associate Scheme (funded undergraduate placements for those considering teaching as a future career) which arguably fulfill a similar ITT partnership role. The following responses were typical:

Currently our biggest contingent is from (Provider A) and we also work with (Providers C, D and E) and (the local) DRB. This year we probably total 47 trainees. That's fairly typical. [Secondary coordinator]

and:

We have 30 trainees per year... we will take them from anywhere. [Secondary coordinator]

There was also a strong sense of recent changes to the role and the Training School designation appears to have given schools the incentive to widen their involvement in ITT.

For example:

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 ...the departments are saying "we want to work with trainees"... That's really exciting. [Secondary coordinator]

The coordinator profile (2)

The coordinators themselves were generally highly experienced, both in the role itself (48.5% had held the post of ITT coordinator for over 5 years, although this figure was reduced to 37% for primary coordinators) and as teachers in general (84% of the

coordinators in secondary schools had been teaching for 15 years or more, as had 52% of their primary colleagues). Many had wider responsibilities in terms of professional development, for example, 66% of secondary coordinators and 55% of primary coordinators also had responsibility for the induction of newly qualified teachers (NQTs); 51% and 52% respectively had responsibility for Continuing Professional Development (CPD). Interestingly, more primary coordinators (70%) were members of the school's senior management team compared to their secondary colleagues (49%), perhaps reflecting the distribution of responsibility across a smaller number of colleagues in most primary schools. Where the school had a specific ITT policy (60% of the schools in the sample) the majority of coordinators in those schools (89%) were responsible for formulating that policy, as one might expect. It was perhaps a little surprising that 40% of the schools had no formal ITT policy.

These coordinators were thus an intriguing group of senior professional colleagues with key roles as gatekeepers to the partnership, and in many cases as mediators of ITT policy and practice in the context of individual schools. Their ability to manage multiple partnerships offers a fruitful area for future research in terms of the networking skills implicit in a role so dependent on individual relationships with a range of adult learners (trainees) and mentors (trainers) in a school setting, and with HEI tutors. Whatever the nature of the institutional links between ITT providers and schools, the coordinators in this study highlighted the need for effective relationships at an individual level as being an important factor, and good communication was seen as part of this. It is perhaps likely that multiple partnerships work in practice not because of the institutional links between ITT providers and individual schools but because of the way that individuals within them work together.

The scope of the coordinator's role (2)

The data indicated that the roles and responsibilities of school-based ITT coordinators were diverse, but might generally be seen, as the literature attests, as falling into four distinct categories:

- i. managerial and administrative
- ii. pedagogical
- iii. monitoring and assessment
- iv. pastoral

The aspect that coordinators themselves saw as being the most important was carrying out *managerial and administrative responsibilities*, such as liaising with colleagues within the school (95%) and with colleagues in HEIs (95%), ensuring that mentors had been appointed and were aware of their responsibilities (92%) and carrying out the initial induction of trainees into the school in question (92%). Secondary coordinators (91%) also saw the organisation of the weekly professional studies programme as being an important aspect of their job, in particular arranging for colleagues to contribute to presentations that focused on specific aspects of the school's policies and practices. This was not, however, a strong feature of the primary coordinator's role (45%) where such a programme might not be formally organised but could be covered in other ways. Finally was the need to carry out some quality assurance evaluations in order to monitor

consistency of provision across the school. This included the organisation of meetings with mentors (84%), formal evaluations of the trainees' experiences in school (77%) and ensuring that the needs of individual trainees were being met (64%).

Coordinators also carried out what might be called a *pedagogical role*, that is to say direct involvement in the trainee's learning, either through regular discussion with the trainees as individuals or as a group, or through observing them in the classroom and providing feedback. The latter was seen as something that had developed more prominence in recent years and was now seen as an integral part of the role by the majority (92%). Many saw the nature of this part of the role as being to provide opportunities for the trainees to reflect on the links between theory and practice (77%). This connects with a third category of activity, namely the *monitoring and assessment of trainees* in terms of the criteria outlined in the Standards required for Qualified Teacher Status (Teacher Training Agency, 2002), particularly in relation to the professional values and practices that new entrants to the profession are expected to demonstrate.

Finally coordinators acknowledged the extent of their *pastoral role* (90% indicated that this was an activity in which they were engaged), including dealing with individual personal problems, negotiating when relationships between trainees and the teachers with whom they were working caused problems, and also providing guidance in terms of job applications, interviews and career decisions.

Benefits of working with a range of providers (2)

As far as the experience of working with a range of different ITT providers is concerned the coordinators in the questionnaire sample identified a number of key issues, some of which were seen as facilitating their work and others of which were seen as having a constraining effect on their role. When asked to focus on the advantages of working with a range of providers, the ITT coordinators' responses fell into three major categories:

- i. providing wider opportunities for support and for the sharing of ideas
- ii. offering wider opportunities for ITT coverage across the school and / or the curriculum
- iii. establishing a culture of discourse about training

In terms of *providing wider opportunities for support and for the sharing of ideas*, this was seen to occur in a variety of different ways. It was felt that the trainees themselves were able to support each other and that an increase in the number of trainees enabled this to happen more fully. In schools with a limited number of trainees from a small number of providers there may be little opportunity to interact with others at a similar stage of development, either informally through discussion with other trainees or formally through the professional studies programme. This is particularly beneficial in the case of the HEI that provides distance learning programmes and which is likely to have only one trainee in any given school. One ITT coordinator commented that the sessions run with trainees benefited from "more diverse interaction and discussion".

Secondly there were seen to be increased benefits for those working directly with the trainees through exposure to a broader range of ideas for effective practice:

There is a cross-fertilisation of ideas between students – I can pick the ‘best’ practice from each. [Secondary coordinator]

Pupils were seen to benefit from this wider involvement, both directly through having trainee teachers in the classroom and indirectly through the sharing of ideas for good practice amongst trainees and school staff.

At another level the school ITT coordinators appeared to value the exposure to different approaches to initial teacher training inherent in the practices of different providers. Both primary and secondary school coordinators cited a number of ways in which this might take place including the range of information available across a range of course handbooks, the way that the required observation and feedback pro-forma from each provider might illustrate different approaches to the monitoring of trainee teachers, and the way in which one’s own skills as a teacher educator might develop through “joint observations with different professionals.”

It was clear that coordinators valued being able to offer wider opportunities for ITT coverage across the school and / or the curriculum and that this was seen as benefiting not just the individual trainees but the school as a whole. The involvement with multiple providers meant that ITT was no longer restricted to specific subject areas or classes within the school but was acknowledged as being a core activity of the school overall. It was generally believed that only by working with more than one provider can it be possible to provide the necessary coverage to achieve this. One primary ITT coordinator saw the advantages as being related to the capacity to spread the responsibility for ITT across a number of staff within the school at different stages of the year rather than the focus

being on one or two individuals for as long as a trainee teacher was placed with a particular class and the effect of this was seen as “reducing strain on the staff involved”. In this way initial teacher training within the school becomes a core, rather than a peripheral activity and the number of trainees involved leads to a critical mass, so that “the school has a group of students and associated mentors at all times of the year”.

In secondary schools the emphasis appeared to be more on covering as much of the curriculum as possible to the extent that, in some cases, all subjects appear to be involved to a greater or lesser extent. When schools had worked with only one or two providers in the past only a limited number of subject areas had been involved, with mentoring skills and strategies confined to a small number of staff, but secondary coordinators were now keen to spread this expertise across the whole school by encouraging as many departments as possible to be involved:

The advantage is we are interested in mentoring our trainees as a vital part of our own staff development. (Provider name) only does six subjects so we want to give other areas opportunities to work with trainees...it's an intentional policy.

[Secondary coordinator]

Issues of coverage and the quantity of trainees in any given school were not, however, seen as being the only advantages. Some coordinators, when considering the advantages of contact with more than one provider, wished to place the emphasis on the development of quality in the school's engagement with ITT and in particular on what one might call the establishment of a culture of discourse. Both primary and secondary coordinators made reference to the enhanced opportunities that come about through working with a number

of providers for gaining different perspectives in relation to ITT-related issues, for example:

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. [Primary coordinator]

It may be that by comparing and contrasting these different perspectives on a range of issues, school-based teacher educators can develop their understanding of these issues more fully, as well as their appreciation of the differing approaches of individual providers. One coordinator commented that staff within the school “gain from different approaches” and another talked about colleagues “sharing a philosophy” in relation to initial teacher training. One interviewee focused on the developed understanding of mentoring through involvement with a number of different providers:

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. [Secondary coordinator]

The culture of discourse was also seen to extend to the actual provision for the trainees in school and the opportunities provided by having a critical mass of trainees. It was noted that the professional studies part of the ITT programme delivered in school can be enhanced by having trainees from a number of providers involved, through the opportunity to explore issues with a larger group of people representing a potentially wider range of viewpoints.

Disadvantages of working with a range of providers (3)

However, the disadvantages emerging from the questionnaire in relation to working with multiple providers fell into a number of inter-related categories. Several of these categories were focused on the organisational and administrative aspects of the work rather than on the quality of the provision itself:

- i. co-ordination
- ii. differing expectations of different providers
- iii. level of support
- iv. levels of administration

The issue of co-ordination was seen by secondary schools as a disadvantage to a far greater extent than it was by primary schools, perhaps because the former are generally working with larger numbers of different providers. The main issue appeared to be the difficulty in providing the separate school-based professional studies programme that individual providers required and organising these into a cohesive programme that would take account of the times that various trainees started and finished their school placements, as well as the specific times of the year that specific issues are expected to be covered. One respondent mentioned the danger of an “overlap of content” as a result of trying to satisfy the differing needs, another talked of the “duplication of additional time”, implying that extra sessions needed to be added so that particular groups of trainees received the same input as others who may already have covered the material in question. The fact

that trainees from different providers arrived at different stages of the year made the provision for induction to the school for them equally difficult to organise. One secondary ITT coordinator commented that “Induction can be patchy – some get a better deal”. The coordination of placements and the related effects was also the main disadvantage highlighted in the interview data:

There are disadvantages: each scheme tends to have its own programme in terms of timing. [Secondary coordinator]

Finally, in terms of coordination, it was also noted that in secondary schools it can be difficult to provide appropriate timetables for trainees from different providers, presumably because the school was conscious of the balance between giving the trainees a range of teaching experience across a number of classes and ensuring that individual pupils in the school had a balance of experienced and beginning teachers.

Both primary and secondary coordinators referred to the differing expectations of different providers (mostly HEIs), concerning both the nature of the training programme and the trainees themselves. One secondary coordinator characterised one of the providers with whom the school works as being “very prescriptive and bureaucratic” in contrast to the other main provider, adding: “it is difficult to accommodate both sets of demands”. The mismatch between what the school could offer and what the provider wanted (or vice-versa) was an issue and this was felt to be exacerbated by the increased demand for places brought about by the increase of alternative routes into teaching, where it was often the trainee who was trying to find a school in which to train. A primary respondent mentioned that in the school in question “we are asked to accommodate three

times the amount we can take". One interviewee, working in a designated Training School, indicated that the school had become very pro-active in determining the type of training experience the beginning teachers should receive and that, rather than trying to accommodate a range of different expectations, had in fact been explicit to the HEIs about their own approaches and how the HEI would need to take these into account. This exemplifies an altering partnership dynamic, in which "power" previously held by the HEI is shifted to successful Training Schools working with multiple providers:

Each HEI has different expectations of what we must provide...we say "this is what you must do for trainees in (school name)". [Secondary coordinator]

If there were differing levels of expectations from individual providers across a number of areas then there were also perceived differences in the *level of support* offered. It was noted that some providers made fewer tutor and/or link tutor visits than others which was seen as a disadvantage, but it was further noted that the nature of the relationship between HEI tutors and mentors (or teacher tutors) differed from one provider to another and that this was seen as a further disadvantage to working with more than one provider.

Both primary and secondary coordinators commented on the disadvantages of having to deal with multiple levels of administration required by different partnerships and, in particular, different *levels of administration* for each scheme, and the paperwork that had to be completed. The range of pro-forma to be completed for each trainee in school, along with the need to understand the way in which the various monitoring and assessment processes operated, appeared to make life more difficult for ITT coordinators and other

teachers with whom the trainees are working. One primary coordinator commented: “I find it easier just working with one provider because you get used to the paperwork”.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS (1)

The reality appears to be that many schools in England, especially secondary, are receiving trainees from a number of different HEI providers as well as those from alternative routes such as the GTP. It is also the case that the national context is now very much different to what it was when Williams and Soares (2000) concluded that:

Significantly there is no evidence from our sample that as schools have become more experienced in their training role, they have developed an interest in extending it further. (Williams & Soares 2000, p 105)

The change in climate may be attributed to a number of factors – initiatives at policy level to develop capacity within the ITT sector seem to have had some success (Furlong et al. 2006) and the data from this study indicate that the development of designated Training Schools has been accompanied by real enthusiasm on the part of those working in them to engage with initial teacher training. Coordinators working in these schools reported 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 something about which they are passive or unenthusiastic. It may of course be the case that coordinators

(occupying leading professional development roles in schools) have benefited in terms of their career progression through being involved in these initiatives, and therefore have a naturally positive view of the impact, but our data would indicate that it is schools themselves embracing the new culture and not just individuals within those schools.

What certainly appears to be the case is that traditional notions of partnership might need to be re-examined in the light of recent trends. Evidence seems to be emerging that partnerships, particularly those involving designated Training Schools, are no longer focused solely on ITT, but are beginning to extend to the sort of multi-level partnerships, involving continuing professional development as well as research and development work in what Edwards (1997) describes as overlapping 'communities of practice'. This mirrors some of the developments in professional development schools in the United States (Darling-Hammond, 1994, Catelli, 1997).

Even within the area of initial teacher education itself the nature of established 'communities of practice' is changing as schools actively seek partnership with a range of different providers and, as is again the case with some designated Training Schools (Brooks, 2006), take responsibility for developing innovative practices within those partnerships. As Hodkinson and Hodkinson (2003) remind us, communities of practice within initial teacher training are not immune from wider contextual issues and, as relationships between schools and providers of initial teacher training become more flexible with the appearance of a number of overlapping networks, it may be worth reflecting on the potential for 'expansiveness' (Wenger, 2000) within the system. Such expansiveness is premised on the notion that strong identity will 'involve multimembership cross multiple boundaries' (p 240). Wenger's focus on boundaries is useful for us here in thinking about

the processes involved when schools are working with a number of different providers (as was the case with the majority of schools in our sample).

The forging of a strong identity in relation to ITT within a school will require those schools working in multiple partnerships to take a large number of factors into account - differences in the content of individual ITT programmes, the underlying principles of these programmes, the course aims, the course structures, the ways in which the respective roles of the HEI and the school are conceptualised, approaches to mentoring, ways of monitoring and assessing trainees and expectations of trainees etc. Boundary processes (Wenger 2000) enable individuals to 'coordinate their actions across boundaries' (p236) and there have been deliberate attempts at national level to foster such processes. The National Partnership Project, funded by the Teacher Training Agency in England, encouraged cooperation between those with an interest in ITT (schools, ITT providers, local authorities) and this led to some successful initiatives at a regional level in, for example the development of commonly agreed assessment materials and other course documentation, and the development of common mentor training programmes (Furlong et al 2006). There are however implications:

...(w)hen partnership is reduced to finding more places or setting up common procedures and paperwork, without paying attention to the epistemological and pedagogical issues underpinning any one teacher education programme, it undermines the nature of the professional education that is offered. Once again, it flattens the complexity and reduces teacher education to technical rationalist tasks. (Furlong et al. 2006 p 43)

The extent, however, to which busy schools can pay attention to these 'epistemological and pedagogical issues' given the range of different ITT providers with whom they are working, is open to question. The data from this study indicate that school coordinators are looking for the common elements of different programmes where possible, but also feel to some extent frustrated by the duplication where there is common ground and the need to understand the unique features of individual programmes where there is not. In addition, coordinators are working with a range of providers who may feel forced to prescribe certain aspects of their training programmes as a result of their own need to secure rigour and demonstrate accountability (Burton, 1998) or by virtue of the fact that they are working at a distance from the vast majority of schools in the partnership (Bourne & Leach 1995) which leaves little room for the processes and practices to be negotiated, rather than directed, and which may result in "bureaucratic rather than collaborative relationships" (Furlong et al. 2000, p 165).

Even where ITT partnerships are designed to be collaborative in nature (Benton, 1990; Harrison, 1995, McIntyre, 1997) schools are still likely to be in partnership with other providers who might follow very different models. This study shows that schools are willing to embrace these difficulties because of the perceived advantages to, amongst others, their own teachers' professional development, the trainees, the pupils and the school as a whole and, as indicated, some Training Schools are beginning to think about how they will set the training agenda. At the moment an important aspect of an ITT provider-led model of partnership is seeking to ensure that all trainees within a given programme have comparable training experiences. Is it feasible to imagine a time where the focus shifts, and where all trainees within a *particular school* have a comparable experience, but where across a specific ITT course they might not, since individual schools might be

determining their own characteristic training experience? There are, however, likely to be some tensions between schools trying to develop coherence for themselves in terms of their ITT provision, and accountable ITT providers trying to preserve coherence for their own partnership. It should not be forgotten that ITT providers are currently responsible for the management and quality assurance aspects of the whole of their provision, including the trainees' school-based experience, and therefore have to be able to demonstrate consistency and coherence in light of rigorous government inspection requirements. Moreover, in examining the way in which partnerships and ITT providers might develop there is no attempt to undermine the 'distinctive contribution' (Burn 2006) made by HEIs to the development of beginning teachers.

The model of schools working in multiple partnerships to the extent that our data indicated clearly has implications for mentoring and mentor development. On the one hand it continues to make sense for mentors to be trained and supported by the ITT provider supplying the trainee(s) with whom they are most closely working. On the other hand it would also seem desirable to have a consistent approach to the development of mentoring skills and strategies within any one school, both in relation to ITT, NQT induction and other aspects of professional development. These two approaches do not need to be mutually exclusive, and this is clearly a role that the ITT coordinator in the school would be in a strong position to develop (Butcher & Mutton, 2006), particularly in the context of the development of a national framework for mentoring (CUREE, 2005). However there is some potential tension here since ITT providers do have a management and quality assurance role which is rigorously monitored through the government's inspection framework and there might thus be a reluctance to relinquish any of this to schools, who are currently not held directly accountable for such issues.

The pastoral aspect of the coordinator's role is also important if schools are working within multiple partnerships in ensuring that trainees receive the necessary support within a culture that promotes their learning. There is evidence that trainees can suffer from 'uncomfortable relationships' (Maguire, 2001) in their placement schools where they are often the least powerful members of the partnership, but coordinators can do much not only to establish an appropriate training culture within the school but also to develop appropriate mentoring skills and strategies and to provide the necessary support to trainees who may feel in any way vulnerable in the school setting.

Another interesting aspect of the findings is the fact that the perceived advantages of working in partnership with a number of different ITT providers all relate to professional benefits, whereas the disadvantages are all seen as being linked to managerial aspects of the coordinator's role. It could be argued that the experience and expertise of ITT coordinators is being wasted if so much of their activity is taken up with administrative and organisational matters, when it is the pedagogical contribution that they can make to trainee teachers' learning, and to the development of mentors, that is likely to be the most significant and rewarding (Mutton & Butcher, 2007). We would argue that developed notions of partnership can go far beyond cooperation at a bureaucratic level and could involve the focus, in some schools at least, on the 'epistemological and pedagogical issues' mentioned above (Furlong et al 2006). The development of a full-time 'site coordinator' in some professional development schools in the United States (Utley et al. 2003) might serve as a model for such development.

Discourse is seen as an important 'boundary object' (Wenger 2000) since it enables 'people to communicate and negotiate meanings across boundaries' (p 236). These data indicate that, among other things, it is the opportunities that school-based teacher education provides for the development of a culture of discourse in schools that is valued, and accepting trainees from a range of different providers is seen to enhance this. What the coordinators were focusing on in this respect was not only the opportunities for the trainees themselves to engage in discussions related to teaching and learning in the school context but also the opportunities for staff in general within the school to do so. Working with a number of different providers was seen to be beneficial in two ways – firstly by ensuring that a greater number of school staff were involved in this discourse and secondly by widening the source of possible ideas for discussion and reflection.

Coordinators see the delivery of an appropriate professional studies programme as contributing to this 'culture of discourse' (exemplified in comments reflecting the importance of their role in "developing a comprehensive, professional studies programme," and "setting a professional and critical ethos through the professional programme") There is, however, as McIntyre et al. (1994) remind us, a danger inherent in a professional studies programme where the focus may primarily be on the way in which things are done in one particular school context. Where schools are working with a number of different providers and perhaps attempting to deliver the requirements of a number of different professional studies programmes it may be that this critical dimension could be lost. This would clearly be to the detriment of the trainees, since what one presumably wants to avoid is producing what Edwards (1997) refers to as "practitioners of an unquestioning and unquestioned craft" (p 79).

Implicit in much of the data, and explicit on occasion, was the fact that many schools working in multiple partnerships associate themselves with one ITT provider and see the others with whom they work as being subsidiary partners. It may be that this association is based on a long standing relationship, or the fact that the provider is the closest geographically. In some cases secondary schools may be working with a relatively large number of trainees from their 'main provider' but also with one or two from another institution in subjects that this main provider does not offer, or with a small number from a 'distance provider'. This is indeed seen as one of the benefits of multiple partnerships and reflects the changing culture in which ITT is seen as an activity that permeates the whole school rather than a limited number of subject areas or classes. This does however raise the question as to whether schools actually work in partnership with a 'home' provider and regard the others as what one might call satellites, or whether they see themselves working in equal but different partnerships with all. Individual relationships, often established over time, are a key part of the 'brokering' process but further research would be needed to probe this issue more fully.

There are clearly implications for both schools and ITT providers in these findings which raise a number of questions, such as the extent to which ITT providers might need to take into account the fact that their partnership schools are also likely to be working with other providers and the opportunities that this might afford. For schools there may be questions as to whether the decisions that schools make (i.e. about the optimum number of trainees and the range of providers with whom they will work) are based on policy or pragmatism, and what the implications of these decisions might be for the role of the school coordinator and the experiences of the trainees themselves. Further analysis of the complex relationships at work within multiple partnerships that have schools at the centre might also

be useful in illuminating the way that the boundary spaces between the existing established systems function and develop, and to what extent the role of the ITT coordinator is integral to this by acting as a 'broker between communities' (Wenger 2000).

Notes

¹The Teacher Training Agency (TTA) was an executive non-departmental public body charged with responsibility for strategic national management of the quantity and quality of those who enter teaching from 1995. Its responsibilities were subsequently enhanced to lead the development of all those working in schools and it was renamed the Training and Development Agency for Schools (TDA) in 2005)

² The study reported here grew out of a regional project, funded by the Teacher Training Agency National Partnership Project, involving colleagues from a number of different institutions. We would like to acknowledge the contribution of Andy Kempe, University of Reading; Christine Donohue ,Oxford Brookes University; Kiersten Best, St.Paul's School, Milton Keynes; and Keith Saunders, Teacher Training Agency who worked with us on the project and contributed to the original data collection and analysis.

³ We have used the term coordinator to designate the person in a school responsible for ITT within the school. In primary schools in England it is not unusual for on individual to play a dual role – coordinating the ITT work in the school overall and supporting the learning of the individual trainee (Edwards and Collison 1996). This may be further complicated by the fact that this person, who might also be called the senior mentor (Furlong et al. 1997), may not necessarily be the class teacher with whom the trainee is working on a day to day basis. Moyles et al. (1998) report the low proportion of primary schools in their survey that had 'mentoring coordinators' 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. In secondary schools the range of titles associated with such a post can be wide ranging (Brooks and Sikes, 1997) and different

ITT providers refer to, amongst others, professional tutor, professional mentor, ITT coordinator, ITT manager, and training manager.

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Table I

Number of ITT providers from whom the school is accepting trainees	Percentage of primary schools (n = 27)	Percentage of secondary schools (n = 33)	Percentage of all schools (n = 60)
1	48	15	31
2	30	30	30
3	18	27	23
4	0	22	11
5	4	6	5

Table I

Percentages of schools in the sample working in partnership with one or more ITT providers

Table II

Length of placement	Number of trainees	Number of primary schools (total n = 27)	Number of secondary schools (total n = 33)	Number of all schools (total n = 60)
6 weeks or under	1-3	11	6	17
	4-6	4	4	8
	7-10	0	3	3
	11-20	1	0	1
	20+	1	0	1
6-9 weeks	1-3	11	4	15
	4-6	10	7	17
	7-10	0	9	9
	11-20	0	4	4
	20+	0	0	0
10 weeks +	1-3	4	6	10
	4-6	1	6	7
	7-10	0	8	8
	11-20	0	7	7
	20+	1	0	1

Table II

Number of schools in the sample receiving a certain number of trainees for particular lengths of time

Table III

Number of GTP trainees	Primary schools (n = 27)	Secondary schools (n = 33)
0	13	12
1	8	10
2	1	3
3	3	1
4	0	5
5	0	1
6	1	0
7	1	0
8	0	0
9	0	1

Table III

Number of schools in the sample carrying out training under the Graduate Teacher Programme