Effective mentoring in Initial Teacher Education
What works and why

Mentoring should be ..... like wearing your glasses.
When I don’t wear them I can see, but in the distance it’s quite blurry. When I wear my glasses it’s clear in the distance.
So your mentor should help to give you a clear vision for your future in teaching.

Final PRAXIS funded project report
(PRAXIS 2021/22 21 AG)

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The Open University Initial Teacher Education Partnership
PGCE Programme

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We also wish to thank all the student teachers, curriculum tutors, mentors, practice tutors and school co-ordinators from across the Partnership who took part in the discussion groups and interviews, or submitted their reflections for this research.

Particular thanks goes to the partner schools who supported the development of the case studies, diolch yn fawr.
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## Glossary

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<th>Term</th>
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<tr>
<td>ESTYN</td>
<td>The education and training inspectorate for Wales</td>
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<tr>
<td>ITE</td>
<td>Initial Teacher Education</td>
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<tr>
<td>PISA</td>
<td>Programme for International Student Assessment</td>
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<tr>
<td>PGCE</td>
<td>Postgraduate Certificate in Education</td>
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<tr>
<td>PPA</td>
<td>Planning, preparation and assessment</td>
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<tr>
<td>QTS</td>
<td>Qualified Teacher Status</td>
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### Two student teachers’ reflections on how mentoring is like nurturing a plant

By caring bit by bit, by giving and **providing information step by step**. That’s what you do when you grow plants. Go back to them every day, do something small, give them what they need and then eventually hopefully something great will grow out of it.

I hope I can keep it alive. And just like my teaching, hopefully it will blossom into something. So I think the mentor relationship is about **teaching the teacher how to start from small** and then grow into something big.

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1 Right hand quote is a translation from a Welsh Medium student teacher: Trwy ofalu fesul tipyn, trwy roi a darparu gwybodaeth gam wrth gam. Dyna beth rydych chi’n ei wneud pan fyddwch chi’n tyfu planhigion. Ewch yn ôl atynt bob dydd, gwnewch rhyweth bach, rhowch yr hyn sydd ei angen arnynt hwn ac yna, gobeithio, y bydd rhywbeth gwych yn tyfu allan ohono.
Executive summary

This PRAXIS-funded research project was designed to understand the range of effective mentoring approaches evident across the Open University Initial Teacher Education Partnership PGCE Programme.

The PGCE launched in September 2020 and delivers a new flexible route into the teaching profession, that intends to remove barriers of location or distance from a university. Student teachers complete either a part-time or salaried route over two years. The programme is delivered via blended learning that combines distance learning with practice learning in schools.

Key messages from the literature

The role of the mentor is multi-faceted. Some of the factors influencing mentors’ input according to the literature include:

**Mentoring models**
- No ‘one size fits all’ approach, there is a need to be contextually responsive

**Roles and terminology**
- A shared understanding of roles and responsibilities would provide clarity of expectations

**Mentor selection**
- Mentors need a good balance of values, dispositions, skills, knowledge, and experience

**Relationships**
- Positive relationships underpin effective mentoring

**Collaboration**
- A whole school approach with the school as a learning organisation is important

**Professional learning**
- There has been a shift in mindset of Initial Teacher Education from simply gaining the qualification to preparing for a career of lifelong learning

**Mentor activities**
- Day-to-day mentoring works well when underpinned with planned and regular pedagogy sessions

**Theory into practice**
- Students benefit from mentors helping them to make connections using appropriate, theoretical language

**Judgementoring**
- There is a need for mentors to strike balance in creating a positive mentoring relationship with student teachers and assessing their progress

**Learning conversations**
- Effective use of dialogic learning conversations can redress hierarchical power struggles

**Time allocation**
- Mentors need to be given an adequate amount of time for their mentoring role

Methodology

A participatory design involved the use of artefacts to support the collection of data from student teachers, school-based mentors, practice tutors, school-co-ordinators and curriculum tutors.

Altogether 31 participants contributed to the study between January and March 2022. Participants took part in either an interview, discussion group or submitted an audio/written reflection. There was representation from each of the Welsh regional education consortia.

The location of research participants’ schools
In agreement with the literature, research participants commented on the multi-faceted role of the mentor and the importance of a range of personal attributes to support the development of an effective mentor-mentee relationship. Some of the key findings from the interviews and discussions include:

**Findings**

Mentoring models and selecting mentors
- Partnership schools use different systems and approaches
- Expertise and the ability to nurture are key when selecting mentors
- Student teachers would rather mentors volunteered for the role

Motivation to mentor
- It is viewed as being a privilege to mentor student teachers
- Mentors reported the benefits of student teachers keeping them up to date
- Experiences gained from previous mentoring, and available training in mentoring and leadership were reported as valuable

The mentor’s role and responsibilities
- The role of the mentor is varied and often challenging for mentors
- The mentoring process is seen as ‘a step-by-step’ approach
- Student teachers need to be fully supported and not ‘over-stretched’
- Mentors enthuse and nurture their student teachers

The qualities of an effective mentor
- There are many personal qualities suggested by mentors and student teachers including:
  - patience; kindness; positivity; reflection; empathy; relatability

Effective approaches to mentoring
- There is agreement that there are many aspects to mentoring but it requires a holistic approach
- Tools such as lesson observation, feedback, target setting, questioning and modelling are reported to be effective

- Learning from mistakes is also acknowledged as important for student teachers

**Barriers to mentoring**
- Completing appropriate mentor training is very important
- A lack of sufficient time to complete the role is a challenge
- If a positive relationship between the mentor and mentee is missing this can impact the ability to build trust

Ten case studies provide exemplars of schools’ different approaches to mentoring student teachers.

Conclusions and recommendations

A range of effective mentoring approaches is evident across the OU ITE Partnership PGCE Programme. The creation of ten case studies showcase effective mentoring in practice as they reflect the range of contexts and approaches across the bilingual ITE Partnership, which is engaging with schools across Wales.

Mentoring is a broad term and can be a demanding role that requires time and space to develop and learn (both from research and practice). There is a clear indication of the existence of a reciprocal relationship with the mentor – mentee, and that relationship can have a significant impact on the effectiveness of the mentoring process. There is agreement that there are many aspects to mentoring but it requires a holistic approach.

Using artefacts as a research tool to stimulate discussion proved very effective in eliciting quality responses from participants.

**Recommendations**

- Investigate the range of mentoring models in partnership schools.
- Offer further information to schools on the attributes and responsibilities mentors require.
- Support a whole school approach to mentoring.
- Disseminate the case studies widely.
Abstract

Supporting student teachers is one of the bedrocks of the teaching profession and contributes to a high-quality teaching profession that is well equipped and enthused to shape young learners. This report presents the findings of a project that explored effective mentoring approaches across The Open University Initial Teacher Education Partnership PGCE programme.

The research involved student teachers, mentors, practice tutors, school coordinators and curriculum tutors. This included focus groups, interviews, audio and written reflections, and using artefacts to support participants’ interpretations of effective mentoring. Participants identified many effective approaches and techniques for mentoring. Some of these key aspects include the importance of a strong and trusting relationship between the student teacher and mentor; nurturing student teacher self-reflection and ensuring that student teachers observe experienced practitioners who demonstrate a range of teaching styles. The importance of mentors volunteering for their mentoring role and for them to be allocated sufficient time to undertake their mentoring responsibilities, which include frequent mentor meetings and professional learning were also prevalent.

The implications of this project’s findings are far reaching and improvement and development of support materials and training activities for partnership mentors are planned along with wider dissemination of effective practice as illustrated in the case studies, which showcase effective approaches in different school contexts.

An example of the kindness, support and time the mentor tries to bring…

‘Having time carved out over something comforting like a cup of tea is essential to these relationships being formed well between mentee and mentor. So that they [mentees] will know that I will carve out time for them.

It’s also a good metaphor for a trainee teacher and for a mentor learning on the job like I am – that it just takes a bit of time to reach the optimum perfect spot.’
1. Introduction

This study was designed to understand the range of effective mentoring approaches evident across The Open University Initial Teacher Education (OU ITE) Partnership PGCE Programme. The creation of case studies to showcase effective mentoring in practice were one of the main outcomes for this PRAXIS-funded study. It is very early in the delivery of the new PGCE Programme that launched in September 2020 and this study offers further insight regarding the effectiveness of the operation and delivery of the programme, following an earlier PRAXIS-funded study that examined the role of the practice tutor on the programme (Lee, Addison-Pettit and Tyler, 2021).

1.1 The Open University Initial Teacher Education Partnership PGCE programme context

A change in educational policy began to emerge in Wales following poor PISA (Programme for International Student Assessment) results in 2009 (OECD, 2014; Welsh Government, 2014). Changes in Initial Teacher Education (ITE) were also proposed (Tabberer, 2013; Furlong, 2015). The curriculum and assessment arrangements in Wales also underwent an independent review, with a Curriculum for Wales to begin in schools in September 2022 (Donaldson, 2015; Welsh Government, 2020). Consequently, the Welsh Government required all ITE delivery to be via partnership working between universities and schools, and new accreditation criteria required joint ownership of programmes (Welsh Government, 2017; 2018). It is within this context that a new flexible route into the teaching profession was developed by the OU ITE Partnership. The new programme intended to remove barriers of location or distance from a university (Welsh Government, 2019).

1.2 The PGCE Programme and rationale for this study

The new OU ITE Partnership PGCE Programme offers student teachers a part-time or salaried route into the teaching profession completed over two years. Those embarking on the salaried route may already be working in a school or able to secure employment in one. The Welsh Government fund this route (The Open University, 2022a). Whereas those who enrol on the part-time route may wish to continue with other work or commitments alongside their studies and this is either self-funded or funded through a loan and grants (The Open University, 2022a). The programme is delivered via blended learning that combines distance learning with practice learning in schools (The Open University, 2022b).

This research project has been informed by many of the key actors of the OU ITE Partnership PGCE Programme. Figure 1.1 shows how some of those engaged in this project provide a community of support for the student teachers. There is also the school co-ordinator role, which provides oversight of ITE provision within a school.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The student teacher’s community</th>
<th>Project participants</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Mentor</strong>: Based in partner schools they support student teachers daily during school placement; providing support with planning, teaching, evaluating, and assessing learning. They complete formal lesson observations and submit regular formative feedback.</td>
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<td><strong>Practice tutor</strong>: A similar role to the traditional ITE university tutor. They support the student teacher to link the theory and practice learning. They assess the student teacher in relation to the Qualified Teacher Status descriptors and coach the mentors.</td>
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(Adapted from Glover and Hutchinson, 2022)

Figure 1.1: Some of the project participants’ roles.

As already noted, the ITE landscape in Wales has undergone a dramatic change in recent years and the critical role of the mentor has been key to this (Estyn, 2018). Curriculum Tutors on the new programme along with the student teachers reported varied approaches and engagement with mentoring sessions and the material they submitted as evidence. The programme’s mentors had also requested more developmental resources and training. Consequently, in a drive to understand what mentoring approaches are most effective and what is the key to their success a research study was developed, with the support of Open University PRAXIS funding, to investigate mentoring approaches more closely.

Therefore, this study’s findings offer the OU ITE Partnership a significant opportunity to inform future mentoring materials and training, that will potentially have a positive impact on the experiences of future student teachers on the programme. The following section presents a synthesis of some of the key literature on mentoring in ITE.

“This is not just any light bulb, but one that has a dimmer and disco lights.

This sums up my mentor as they kept my kind of spark and enthusiasm. They did an amazing job working with me and keeping that spark in me alive.”
2. Literature review

2.1 Introduction

The following presents an overview of the key elements reported to be critical for effective mentoring in ITE. As introduced earlier, changes in ITE in Wales and further afield have resulted in an increased role for schools and school mentors (Lee, Addison-Petit, and Tyler, 2021; Pinnick, 2020; Lofthouse, 2018). The role of the mentor is multifaceted with much expected from those in the role (Estyn, 2018); support for student teachers to develop their knowledge and skills from an experienced teacher (Lofthouse, 2018), along with support and guidance including for emotional support and continuing professional development with focus on their specific subject and becoming a reflective practitioner (Pinnick, 2020). However, the changes in ITE and the resultant increase in schools’ engagement in the process has resulted in variation in approaches to in-school mentoring (Forster et al., 2021). It is also noted that approaches vary according to the type of school and its context, with a school’s culture having an impact on mentoring (Forster et al., 2021; Lee, Addison-Petit, and Tyler, 2021; Estyn, 2018).

Nevertheless, the impact of a mentor on a student teacher must not be under-estimated, as it will reach far beyond a student teacher’s initial training experience and impact their future career (Lofthouse, 2018). However, it has also been reported that student teachers’ expectations for the level of support they receive from a mentor can ‘fall short’ (Chan, 2020, p. 191; Davis and Fantozzi, 2016). A range of factors influence the input from a mentor such as the mentor’s workload, time available, level of training for mentoring and the relationship that develops between the mentor and mentee (Chan, 2020; Connolly, Bates, and Shea, 2020; Fletcher, Astall and Everatt, 2021; Howard, 2021).

The following discussion examines the key features, according to the literature, that influence the effectiveness of mentoring in ITE. To begin with a few models for mentoring are discussed. This is followed by an overview of the importance of clarity in the roles and responsibilities for those involved in mentoring in ITE. A range of themes including relationships, collaboration, learning conversations and the use of technology are then discussed.
Key messages from the literature

The role of the mentor is multi-faceted
There is variation in the approaches adopted for mentoring between schools
A range of factors influence mentors’ input

- **Mentoring models**
  - No ‘one size fits all’ approach, there is a need to be contextually responsive
  - Mentors help translate theory into practice

- **Roles and terminology**
  - A shared understanding of roles and responsibilities would provide clarity of expectations
  - Being mindful of unconscious biases at play is important

- **Mentor selection**
  - Mentors need a good balance of values, dispositions, skills, knowledge, and experience
  - Careful pairings can support positive relationships

- **Relationships**
  - Positive relationships underpin effective mentoring

- **Collaboration**
  - A whole school approach with the school as a learning organisation is important
  - There can be a tension between collaboration and power in mentoring

- **Professional learning**
  - There has been a sizeable shift in mindset of ITE from simply gaining QTS, to preparing for a career supported by life-long learning

- **Mentor activities**
  - Day-to-day mentoring works well when underpinned with planned and regular pedagogy sessions

- **Theory into practice**
  - Students benefit from mentors helping them to make connections using appropriate, theoretical language

- **Judgementoring**
  - There is a need for mentors to strike an appropriate balance in creating a positive mentoring relationship with student teachers and assessing their progress

- **Learning conversations**
  - Effective use of dialogic learning conversations can redress hierarchical power struggles

- **Time allocation**
  - Mentors need to be given an adequate amount of time for their mentoring role
  - Time for mentor training and engagement with mentoring materials is crucial

- **Application of technology**
  - Effective application of technology can improve the mentoring process
  - The application of technology should have explicit pedagogic understanding

- **Impact of Covid-19**
  - Covid-19 reaffirmed the importance of the mentoring relationship
  - Some innovations emerged out of necessity and will support positive change in mentoring

2.2 Mentoring models

There is no ‘one size fits all’ model for mentoring in teacher education (Parker, Zenkov and Glaser, 2021). Therefore, a degree of caution should be exercised when reviewing such models and the strategies adopted to fit specific contexts. Nevertheless, it is apparent that conceptions of mentoring and the mentoring role have changed over time, as summarised in Figure 2.1.

![Figure 2.1: An overview of mentoring models (adapted from Parker, Zenkov and Glaser, 2021, p. 67).](image)

Others have also summarised the key dimensions of effective mentoring in teacher education and Figure 2.2 presents an overview of some of the key central aspects proposed. It is evident that similar threads and principles are apparent across the different models, such as the importance of relationships, collaboration, values and dispositions of the mentor, pastoral and curriculum support and being able to link theory with practice.

It is always important to consider the context and development phase of the student and as illustrated in Figure 2.2, there is often a mixture of approaches according to a particular context. For instance, the critical transformative model looks at mentors as leaders of change and innovation with the new generation of teachers being the pivotal in that development (Orland-Barak and Wang, 2021). The integrated mentoring model in Figure 2.2 presents some of the interactions and examples of the critical thinking required to effectively mentor trainee teachers and develop a progressive support system (Orland-Barak and Wang, 2021). Building on Cunningham’s architecture (2007), the school’s commitment to mentoring will create the solid foundation into which the values and dispositions are embedded in to a school’s culture (Hobson and Maxwell, 2020).
Parallels can be drawn between some of the features expected in the mentoring architecture (Cunningham, 2007) and the Welsh Government’s schools as learning organisations model developed to support education reform (Welsh Government, 2018a). Figure 2.3 illustrates the seven dimensions of this model, and it is reported that where schools have an ‘established culture of learning’ effective mentoring is taking place (Estyn 2018, p. 6). Others reiterate this position, with it emphasised that developing effective mentoring will support the establishment of a high-quality education sector (Bethell et al., 2020). However, it is also proposed that ‘significant investment is needed’ to deliver mentor development in Wales (Milton et al., 2020, p. 13).
It is useful to remember that the Schools as a Learning Organisation Model refers to the culture and ethos of the school environment and although it is not linked directly to any one specific mentoring model, elements of the practising teacher standards do, however, guide the work of mentors.

![Diagram of Schools in Wales as Learning Organisations](image)

**Figure 2.3:** *Schools in Wales as learning organisations (Welsh Government, 2018a).*

Pinnick (2020) refers to professional teaching standards supporting the work of the mentors in England. A recurring challenge is the inconsistent use of the optional mentoring standards, which in comparison to the Welsh standards does appear to be lacking in some form. The values and dispositions required by student and qualified teachers are shown in Figure 2.4. These underpin the five professional standards of i). pedagogy, ii). leadership, iii). professional learning iv). innovation and v). collaboration (Welsh Government, 2019b).

![Diagram of Values and dispositions](image)

**Figure 2.4:** *The values and dispositions of a Qualified Teacher in Wales (Welsh Government, 2019b).*
By using the professional standards as a model for student teachers, school-based mentors, school coordinators and practice tutors, there is a shared vocabulary and common lexicology when describing the standard for progress and success. This clarity of terminology is an aspect that some believe needs to be strengthened, in addition to making the roles in a mentoring partnership explicitly clear and understood by all involved, as will be discussed in the following sections.

2.3 Clarity of roles and terminology

This idea of accurate terminology and a shared understanding is important and some call for those in teacher education to craft ‘a shared lexicon’ (Parker, Zenkov and Glaser, 2021, p. 66). The complexity of difference between Initial Teacher Education or Initial Teacher Training is raised by others who argue that there is a need for a collective term to allow for practicality and criticality (Forster, et al., 2021). In the review of Teacher Education in Scotland, the importance of defining roles in mentoring are recognised, with it suggested that it required ‘the redefinition of roles and responsibilities to include increased reflection, collaboration and partnership’ (Donaldson, 2010, p. 48).

In Wales, there has been discussion focussed on the understanding of the role of mentors and the challenge of mentors not viewing their role as teacher educators (Estyn, 2018). Others reiterate a conflict in understanding the mentor role, with communication and accountability raised as needing more clarity (Hobson and Maxwell, 2020). The challenges reported by student teachers in understanding roles and expectations also highlights the complexity of making sure the roles of those involved in mentoring are clear from the outset (Aderbigbe, Gray and Colucci-Gray, 2018).

Fletcher, Astall and Everatt (2021) also note that having a shared glossary and understanding of key roles and concepts is useful in ensuring unconscious bias does not influence judgements made. Judgements either made informally through the mentoring process or formally in the reaching of grades against QTS (Qualified Teacher Status) standards.

2.4 Mentor selection and mentor values

The types of values and dispositions expected to be exhibited by teachers in Wales are outlined in the professional standards (Welsh Government, 2019b). The values and dispositions held by the mentor have an impact on the student teacher experience, and for this reason many advocate a careful selection and pairing of mentors with student teachers. The need for appropriate mentor training to develop the ‘skills of mentoring and associated assessment processes’ is emphasised by some (Mackie, 2020, p. 256). An element of this is the significance of the mentor-mentee pairing and the importance of being able to discuss issues with a mentor provides a coping strategy for student teachers (Wilson and Huynh, 2019). This helps build self-esteem and confidence, and student teachers with high self-esteem have more positive coping mechanisms, than student teachers with low self-esteem who may exhibit avoidance behaviour (Wilson and Huynh, 2019). Some of the key personal attributes an effective mentor needs to have include:

- kindness,
- empathetic,
- supportive,
- open,
- provides non-judgemental feedback
- humility
• willingness to help
• calm focus
• high expectations
• listens
• exhibits patience  (Parker, Zenkov and Glaser, 2021, p. 65)

However, simply having the key personal attributes, values and dispositions, knowledge and skill does not necessarily equip the mentor with everything needed for a purposeful mentoring partnership. This is particularly important as variation in the recruitment, training and quality assurance of mentoring have been reported, with an over-reliance on goodwill evident (Forster et al., 2015). Hobson and Maxwell (2020) go even further to state that the accountability rests on the mentors’ veracity rather than formal mentoring models or structures.

It could be assumed that a mentor should possess the passion and desire to share their knowledge with student teachers and empower them to develop as a student teacher. As stated in the Professional Standards for Teaching ‘Leadership takes account of the experience of other colleagues, the challenges they face and encourages them to flourish’ (Welsh Government, 2019b, p. 103). However, others comment that not all mentors share a passion for being a mentor and can be given the role as a result of their senior position (Fletcher, Astall and Everatt, 2021).

2.5 Relationships

As discussed, effective mentoring partnerships are crucial and this is reiterated by others (Izadinia, 2016; Ellis, Alonzo and Nguyen, 2020). It is proposed that mentoring is most effective when both the mentor and student teacher enjoy a positive relationship as this provides students with the ‘emotional safety’ to engage in self-reflection and critical conversations, as they work towards developing their own professional independence. The essence of this collaborative mentoring model is mutually beneficial for all parties and close relationships and collaboration are valuable for both the student teacher and mentor’s professional learning (Trevethan, 2017; Aderbigbe, Gray and Colucci-Gray, 2018). However, it can be a challenge for mentors to maintain the positive relationship, particularly during critical reflection and dialogic learning conversations (Chan, 2020; Fletcher, Astall and Everatt, 2021). The significance of acknowledging both the mentor and mentee’s input requires equal collaboration (Mackie, 2020).

Power imbalances that can be experienced when assessing student teachers’ progress and leading mentorship are a key factor to consider (Jones et al., 2021; Mackie, 2020). It is suggested that to mitigate against ‘judgementoring’ it is important to guarantee that the mentor’s role is established with a ‘supportive relationship’, that includes ‘constructive feedback and listening.’ (Jones et al., 2021, p.4). This also resonates with others, with it suggested that mentoring relationships should be ‘more symmetrical’, which requires a change in tone from the hierarchical relationship and the associated power challenges (Mackie, 2020, p. 276).

It takes time for a mentor relationship to grow and develop strength in its connection and effect, and a short placement does not necessarily help to facilitate a strong relationship (Wilson and Huynh, 2019). Student teachers’ well-being can be of concern if there is a lack of ‘appropriate mentorship support, consequently those student teachers who experience increased anxiety may need to be supported with other coping strategies (Wilson and Huynh, 2019).
2.6 Collaboration

It could be assumed that, as discussed above, for such mentoring relationships to be effective collaboration is a critical element of the process. Such collaboration exists and is important on different levels (Orland-Barak and Wang, 2021); i). between the university and the school partner (Badia and Clarke, 2021; Ellis, Alonzo and Nguyen, 2020; Furlong, 2015), ii). within the practice school as a whole and iii). between the mentor and mentee (Jones et al., 2021; Aderibigbe, Gray and Colucci-Gray, 2018; Donaldson, 2010). The role of the whole school in the mentoring process is particularly pertinent as collaboration features in student teachers’ satisfaction with their school experience and mentoring (Fletcher, Astall and Everatt, 2021). However, constraints in collaboration have been commented upon; with the process interpreted as a ‘task’ by some instead of it being a ‘guiding principle’ and that there is a need to improve the understanding that mentoring is part of ‘an expansive professional learning culture’ (Aderibigbe, Gray and Colucci-Gray, 2018, p. 66).

The significance of effective collaboration is reinforced by others, with the school as the learning organisation of significance (Milton et al., 2020; Estyn, 2018; OECD, 2016). However, a word of caution emerges in that successful collaboration requires ‘self-forming groups’ who share a mutual interest that will develop over time (Milton et al., 2020, p. 3). A tension between collaboration and power is also identified and ensuring collaborative practice for student teachers avoids any potential conflict is critical (Mackie, 2020). As collaboration is one of the professional standards for teaching and leadership in Wales, the foundations laid during the student teacher journey are particularly important (Welsh Government, 2019b).

2.7 Professional learning

The Professional Standards refocus on lifelong learning for all teachers (Welsh Government, 2019b). However, there are challenges in ensuring quality, accessibility and understanding the requirements for a mentoring partnership (Estyn, 2018). Several issues have been raised for concern, these include inconsistencies in training and concern for the quality of assessment (Estyn, 2018). Also, feedback and assessment being too generous and inadequate provision of targets focused on areas that require development for student teachers (Estyn, 2018).

The impact of inadequate professional learning contributes to school-to-school variation with the styles and strategies used and often depends on the expertise of the individual mentor. A consequence of the lack of effective mentor training can result in mentors left to draw on their own first-hand experiences of ITE (Trevethan, 2017; Lofthouse, 2018; Clarke and Mena, 2020). The lack of time available to engage with mentor training materials is also of concern (Parker, Zenkov and Glaser, 2021; Aderbigbe, Gray and Colucci-Gray, 2018). In addition to time, the provision and quality of training materials are frequently highlighted as an area for development (Milton et al., 2020; Forster et al., 2021). This is also discussed by Parker, Zenkov and Glaser (2021) who propose a comprehensive module overview of a mentor training programme. The overarching structure of their training programme is presented in Figure 2.5, with more detailed description contained in Annex B.
Mentor activities

An effective mentor will act as a role model and information source for the developing student teacher. This is achieved through a variety of mentoring activities such as modelling teaching, planning, evaluation, but also to model the thinking around the intricacies of effective teaching (Nguyen and Hudson, 2012; Izadinia, 2016; Mena, Hennissen and Loughran, 2017; Ellis, Alonzo and Nguyen, 2020). The mentoring activities that take place give the mentors and student teachers an opportunity to reflect on what has gone well in lesson planning and delivery in addition to providing the platform necessary to engage in critical self-reflection (Fletcher, Astall and Everatt, 2021; Estyn, 2018; Badia and Clarke, 2021).

The forward planning of mentor activities and discussion points is important (Forster et al., 2021). The benefits of team teaching as a learning tool for student teachers is well documented, and this collaborative activity supports the role of peer observation and self-reflection and this can be useful for school-based mentors as an effective form of professional development too (Guise et al., 2017; Doherty, 2021). It is practical for student teachers to develop new skills under the watchful, experienced, and often protective eye of their mentor. In addition to the day-to-day mentoring that takes place, one of the assessment roles carried out by mentors is the formal lesson observation with a focus on written feedback and associated learning conversations. However, during formal lesson observations, students may only have partial recollection of the verbal discussion due to heightened emotions (Puttick and Wynn, 2021). It is suggested that the most valued aspects of lesson feedback should be emphasised throughout the formal written account. Such feedback can include elements that are descriptive, pose questions or reflections, or offer advice. Some have also suggested that there needs to be a modelling of the writing of observation forms, support for engagement with research and opportunity to reflect on the formative feedback’s impact on practice (Puttick and Wynn, 2021).

Theory into practice

Teaching is a highly skilled profession that needs a foundation of pedagogical research with the theory applied to real-life contexts. It is reasoned that mentors need to model linking theory with practice to student teachers and ensure these connections use suitable language (Ellis, Alonzo and Nguyen, 2020). Others also allude to the depth of knowledge and understanding of the mentor being a contributory factor for good mentoring so that a mentor’s authority is clear (Hobson and Maxwell, 2020). However, there is a need to improve this aspect of mentoring (Parker, Zenkov and Glaser, 2021). Mentors can
feel out of touch regarding some aspects of the practice as it may be some time since they completed their qualification and they mentors would benefit from more awareness of the university content (Pinnick, 2020; Harrison, Dymoke, and Pel, 2006). This challenge in the pedagogic knowledge divide between the university and school is apparent in Wales (Estyn, 2018).

On the other hand, it is important for student teachers to become independent early on and be introduced to self-reflection early too (Harrison, Dymoke, and Pel, 2006; Mackie, 2020). Yet, engaging mentors in the design and evaluation of ITE programmes can help to strengthen the connection between the university and school setting (Parker, Zenkov and Glaser, 2021).

2.10 Judgementoring

Even though the impact of relationships and collaboration can be positive, it is also apparent that there is sometimes a conflicting dual role for the school-based mentors. One of providing quality feedback and setting targets for development and the other role of assessing student teachers against the QTS standards. The term ‘Judgementoring’ has been introduced by some to describe this dual role, but the use of this can negatively impact a mentee (Fletcher, Astall and Everatt, 2021). As the professional standards stipulate, teachers should be seeking ways to innovate and take risks rather than looking for ways to please their mentor or to replicate their teaching styles (Welsh Government, 2019b). However, it is also suggested that an over-reliance on the professional standards can lead to a lack of innovation (Aderibigbe, Gray and Colucci-Gray, 2018). Even when the QTS standards are met, what that looks like in practice and how they are arrived at may be different. For example, this can depend on the community context for the school and teacher (Brooks, 2021).

2.11 Learning conversations

As discussed, once a positive relationship is established, the mentor and student teacher might begin to engage in activities to secure progress. However, the unplanned, incidental conversations can also often have a significant impact on student teachers’ learning (Jones, Tones, and Foulkes, 2019). It is not just the act of the learning conversation that has a profound impact on the student teacher, but also the way these learning conversations take place. As indicated earlier, a professional relationship built on collaboration helps to balance power dimensions that may manifest itself in monological conversations; as a ‘dialogic approach’ can be ‘more democratic’ (Jones et al., 2021, p. 1). This can help to encourage a collaborative approach and build positive relationships. However, not all mentors possess the skillset for such ‘constructive conversations’ (Jones et al., 2021, p. 9). This view is echoed by Chan (2020) who referred to the power struggles that may be evident in a such learning conversations.

2.12 Time allocation

It is reported that sufficient time is required to be an effective mentor to the required standards. The amount of time a mentor is allocated in each setting varies. Mentors who do not have the appropriate amount of time allocated can find the role challenging (Fletcher, Astall and Everatt, 2021; Aderibigbe, Gray and Colucci-Gray, 2018). Mentors who do not receive an adequate amount of time to undertake the role appear to be in this situation due to financial arrangements as opposed to a lack of understanding of the time needed to complete the role effectively (Crooks, London, and Snelson, 2021; Pinnick, 2020). It is also suggested that student teachers should train themselves to be critically reflective of their own practice as this can be done without the support of the mentor (Pinnick, 2020).
Some might argue that this is a useful skill for student teachers in their career-long learning journey, but it does raise the question if it is a suitable replacement for effective mentoring.

2.13 Application of technology

Driven by the Covid 19 pandemic, there has been a recent increased demand on student teachers, teachers, and teacher educators to utilise technology to plan and deliver lessons, conduct mentoring, access training, and run meetings. The application of technology can increase the potential for positive relationship building and help to break down barriers as activity is conducted in ‘the third space’ (Chan, 2020). This is helpful as student teachers are familiar with communicating online and help with connections beyond a student teachers immediate subject or age group (Chan, 2020). However, there can be challenges to building a positive relationship when mentoring online, including that it can take longer to develop a ‘rapport’ between the mentor and mentee (Chan, 2020, p. 206).

The use of video recording is also increasing in teacher education and some student teachers report that it is beneficial to be able to observe what is happening instead of talk about it (Forster et al., 2021). Video recording has the potential to be used by mentors to assist with mentoring, assessing, and creating video resources. Using equipment for live coaching can have a positive impact development, with informal mentor feedback (via an earpiece) that happens at the time reported to be most helpful (Jones et al., 2021). However, using such technology requires an understanding that focuses on quality teaching and learning as opposed to simply using the technology superficially (Marsh, 2021).

2.14 Impact of Covid-19

It does not seem possible to talk of ITE over the last few years, without acknowledging some of the disruption that has been brought about by Covid-19. Yet it is necessary to look beyond the obvious challenges such as school closures, placement durations, class allocation and experience, use of technology, student teachers and mentors reacting and adapting, health concerns and social and emotional stressors. Covid-19 also instigated a very real need for innovation in a real-life context; a renewed focus on the importance of personal relationships, and the use of remote technology to support change. Although valuing the face-to-face contact with students and mentors was recognised, the situation brought a new way of working and communicating, some of which have improved the overall role of mentoring (Howard, 2021). Yet, operating online mentoring was not without challenges, such as the lack of the daily informal face to face contact with peers to solve minor problems and the sense of isolation people experienced (Howard, 2021). Such experiences reiterate the significance of the effective relationship, collaboration, and emotional support aspect for mentoring.

As the new post-pandemic world is navigated, there may be many innovations that will remain as improvements to support mentoring. What remains a constant is the power that is held in a positive, collaborative, dialogic relationship.

‘.. at the heart of training is the role of personal relationships and strong partnerships that underpins all we do’ (Howard, 2021, p. 133).
3. Methodology

This research project used a range of qualitative data collection approaches. A participatory design involved the use of artefacts and audio/visual stimuli with participants to support the collection of data from student teachers, school-based mentors, practice tutors, school-co-ordinators and curriculum tutors. Figure 3.1 provides an overview of the data collection methods.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Number of volunteers*</th>
<th>Number who participated</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Student teacher</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School-based mentor</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Practice Tutor</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Co-ordinator</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>36 volunteers*</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*A small number of participants undertake more than one role for the PGCE Programme – for example they are a Practice Tutor and the School Co-ordinator or a mentor and a School-Co-ordinator.

When the research was originally planned it was expected that a sampling framework would be required to ensure a balance of representation from primary, secondary, Welsh-medium, rural, and urban schools. However, when the volunteer sample was examined, this provided a range of different settings, so it was decided to invite all volunteers to participate. For example, the student teacher sample included those based in primary, secondary, Welsh and English-medium, and dual-stream schools, with a mixture of year 1 and year 2 student teachers and those on both the part-time and
salaried route. These student teachers were also located in all the four regional education consortia across Wales.

The sample of mentors was also very similar, it included mentors based in all the education consortia, primary and secondary schools, including one Welsh medium school. Even though the sample of practice tutors and school co-ordinators is small they included both school phases and three of the regional education consortia. Figure 3.2 provides an overview of the location of the schools for all those who participated in the study.

![Location of Schools](image)

**Figure 3.2: The location of all research participants’ schools.**

Each pin represents a participants’ school. In some instances there was more than one participant from a school.

During March and April 2022, four student teacher focus groups were conducted with a total of 13 student teachers; 10 school-based mentors were interviewed and four practice tutors/school-co-ordinators submitted reflections (in audio and written format). Appendix A contains the discussion schedules/ prompts for reflection for all the data collection. All discussions and interviews were recorded and transcribed and sought to discuss participants’ experience of mentoring and particular approaches they found effective. The focus groups with student teachers and curriculum tutors were about 45 minutes long and the semi-structured interviews with mentors 30 minutes. Each participant received a £25 thank you voucher for their time and participation.

The artefact participants were invited to bring to the discussion was intended to represent their perception of effective mentoring. Key enablers and barriers to successful mentoring were also discussed. Questions were provided for Practice Tutors and School Co-ordinators to scaffold their reflection. However, this was very much left to the participant regarding their choice of focus for their reflection and whether they selected to write or record their thoughts.

Ethical approval for the research project was received from the Open University Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC: 4199). All participants received detailed information sheets prior to discussions/interviews and written consent was obtained. All participants were free to withdraw themselves from the research. Permission to name schools in case studies was obtained from headteachers and the research participant/s involved once case studies had been drafted. Apart from the case studies no school or individual is identified in the final report. All case studies are found in
Appendix C, with individual case studies linked to relevant sections in the discussion of findings as appropriate.

Once all data was collected, qualitative data analysis software (NVivo) was used to support coding and analysis. The use of such software is valuable in that its tools support the analysis of differences, similarities and relationships between material (Jackson and Bazeley, 2019). In this instance, content analysis was employed with a coding framework determined from the outset and refined during the initial phase to support systematic and flexible coding (Krippendorff, 2019). The project followed the steps proposed by Schreier (2013); 1). Deciding on a research question; 2). Selecting material; 3). Building a coding frame; 4). Segmentation; 5). Trial coding; 6). Evaluating and modifying the coding frame; 7). Main analysis; 8). Presenting and interpreting findings.

Table 3.2 provides a few examples of some of the themes used and is an extract from the project’s codebook. In several instances sub-themes were allocated, for instance to accommodate the different approaches to mentoring (e.g. emotional support, feedback, modelling, questioning, target setting).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code/theme</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Selection of mentors</td>
<td>How are mentors selected for ITE?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mentor’s role and responsibilities</td>
<td>The role and responsibilities of a mentor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Qualities of a good mentor</td>
<td>References to qualities expected/experienced in a good mentor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mentor meeting format</td>
<td>Structure and content of mentor/mentee meetings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barriers to mentoring</td>
<td>Barriers to mentoring the student teacher and/or for people to become a mentor</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The thematic coding of data supported the analysis in answering the following research questions:

1) What do the student teachers deem to be effective approaches to mentoring them towards achieving qualified teacher status (QTS)? And why?
2) How well do mentors understand their role around supporting students to become research literate, and to integrate theory and practice?
3) What do mentors consider to be effective strategies to mentoring student teachers towards achieving QTS? And why?

The case studies developed were shared with the relevant participants as well as school headteachers and the final draft report was also shared with all participants for comment. The following sections present a discussion on the findings (Section 4) and the conclusions and recommendations for the research project (Section 5).

‘There are lots of different aspects to the bicycle-tool.’ Mentoring is like this – there are different ways of doing things/ different approaches that can be used to support a mentor session or the discussion following a lesson.
4. Discussion of findings

This section is informed by the data collected during mentor interviews, student teacher and curriculum tutor discussion groups, and written and audio reflections submitted by practice tutors and school co-ordinators.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key findings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Mentoring models and selecting mentors</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o Partnership schools use different systems and approaches</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o Expertise and the ability to nurture are key when selecting mentors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o Student teachers would rather mentors volunteered for the role as opposed to the role being forced upon them</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Motivation to mentor</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o It is viewed as being a privilege to mentor student teachers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o Mentors reported the benefits of student teachers keeping them up to date</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o Experiences gained from previous mentoring, and available training in mentoring and leadership was reported as valuable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>The mentor’s role and responsibilities</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o The role of the mentor is varied and often challenging for mentors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o The mentoring process is seen as ‘a step-by-step approach’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o Student teachers need to be fully supported and not ‘over-stretched’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o Mentors enthuse and nurture their student teachers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>The qualities of an effective mentor</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o There are many personal qualities suggested by mentors and student teachers:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>▪ patience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>▪ kindness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>▪ positivity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>▪ reflection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>▪ empathy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>▪ relatability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Effective approaches to mentoring</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o There is agreement that there are many aspects to mentoring but it requires a holistic approach</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o Tools such as lesson observation, feedback, target setting, questioning and modelling are reported to be effective</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o Learning from mistakes is also acknowledged</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Barriers to mentoring</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o Completing appropriate mentor training is very important</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o A lack of sufficient time to complete the role is a challenge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o If a positive relationship between the mentor and mentee is missing this can impact the ability to build trust</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4.1 Mentoring models and selecting mentors

During the data collection, it became apparent that each school has a unique perspective with slightly different systems and processes. This supports the conclusions of others (Ellis, Alonzo and Nguyen, 2020; Parker, Zenkov and Glaser, 2021). For example, in one medium-sized secondary school the deputy headteacher has the roles of the school co-ordinator and practice tutor. Whereas a headteacher of a small primary school explained that they acted as the school co-ordinator and the school-based mentor. A future line of inquiry could be to look at the varying mentoring support systems and models in schools across the partnership in more detail.

As with the range of mentoring models in the partnership, how schools select mentors also varies. According to almost all the mentors interviewed it is the more experienced members of staff who are selected for the mentor role by the school. Some qualified this further commenting that it is also necessary for the mentor to have the ‘ability to foster productive relationships’ too; as mentoring is ‘a process made up of expertise and nurturing’. However, one school co-ordinator commented that although those with experience are selected, it is important that these teachers dedicate their time to the role. One interviewee recalled working in a school where mentoring responsibilities were recognised and time allocated to the role; also the class a student had been placed in received the finance that came with the student. This meant that resources were purchased for the class because the mentoring had taken place mainly in that class. Case studies 1, 3, and 4 include reflections on ensuring mentors have the expertise and attributes to nurture student teachers.

However, one mentor commented that although the expertise of an experienced teacher is important in mentoring student teachers, it may have been a long time since they were a student teacher themselves. Also, the other responsibilities and demands on the time of heads of department or those in more senior positions could impact how much time they would actually be able to offer the student. Whereas a teacher more recently qualified can potentially empathise with the student teacher better as less time has elapsed since they were in the same situation. Other student teachers agreed that good mentors are not necessarily those who have extensive years of teaching experience, but they may have taught for three or four years.

Another student teacher commented that in their experience mentors were appointed, as opposed to volunteering for the role, and at times this can ‘make you as the student feel awkward because you’re being a burden to them’. The student teachers also commented that they can tell the difference between the mentors who have been ‘put in that position and [those] who want to be in that [mentoring] position’. Others have reported on mentors being allocated to the role due to their senior position and that the passion to mentor student teachers can be lacking (Fletcher, Astall and Everatt, 2021).

‘I think they should really volunteer for that role and it [mentoring] shouldn’t be forced upon them, because then you just feel awkward as a student.’
(Student teacher focus group)

Student teachers reflected that they were aware of the time pressures that some of their mentors experienced, and the student teachers would decide not to ‘overload’ their mentors, even though
they valued their thoughts and contributions. In some of these instances the student teacher would draw on the support of the school co-ordinator and specifically use their mentor’s input for more subject specific support.

4.2 Motivation to mentor

‘I enjoy mentoring and feel it is important to ensure the future generation of teachers continue to have positive experiences which will give them a good start in their early teaching career.’

(Practice Tutor reflection)

The above comment reflects the views of many of the mentor interviewees too. It was also reported that mentoring keeps teachers up to date, particularly as student teachers are ‘at the cutting edge of research’ (including Curriculum for Wales). The fact that student teachers’ research can mean they are aware of the most up to date pedagogies that had possibly not made it to the classroom yet resulted in mentors being able to learn as much from the students as the students learn from the mentor. One Practice Tutor commented that their motivation as a practitioner comes from the engagement they have with student teachers as well as with other teachers that supports them to continue to develop their own classroom practice. As noted in case study 6 ‘having a student teachers encourages mentors to self-reflect on their own practice’. One mentor reflected in the passion they held for making certain that those new to the workplace are welcomed and supported. They also commented on the enjoyment of observing student teachers as they progressed, in the same way as when a pupil succeeds, they recognised the pleasure of witnessing this.

Other mentors recalled their time when they were training to teach and the importance of the relationship with their mentor. The importance of relationship is discussed further later and in the case studies. The impact of an effective mentor on a student teacher’s career was recognised as being long lasting and therefore viewed my mentors as a privilege and ‘honour’. One mentor commented on the improvement in their own practice as a result of being a mentor, in order to be able to model ‘good skills’ for their student teacher. One mentor interviewee also reported that they had benefited by being able to learn more about their own class as they took a step back and observed. Others commented on the importance of ensuring that there is always someone there – to support student teachers as sometimes student teachers can feel overwhelmed and isolated.

‘I found it [mentoring] really rewarding. A case of giving that little bit back because you know, it’s like I said at the start I’ve been in their shoes. People have given their time up for me and provided me with fantastic service and a great experience and I want to do the same.’

(Mentor interview)
Some mentors reflected on the source of their mentoring knowledge and expertise and referred to a range of experiences as being important to them. Some of these included prior mentoring experiences, which for some, included mentoring student teachers for different ITE providers and attending training courses available at the time, being in other school leadership roles also supported some with their mentoring approach. Others reflected on drawing on other colleagues’ mentoring knowledge and experience, including school staff in senior roles and those in the role of Practice Tutor and/or School Co-ordinator for the programme. One mentor commented that their priority was to ‘immerse’ themself in available mentor training materials. Another mentor reported the importance of being able to empower people as opposed to having a hierarchical approach in their setting. They commented that valuable qualities in student teachers can be encouraged when people are given responsibility in the classroom. Techniques gained from coaching and mentoring, along with other leadership training have proved important sources of knowledge for many mentors.

4.3 Using artefacts as a research method

The use of artefacts as a research tool was chosen to facilitate a more creative approach to data collection in focus groups and/or interviews. The hope being that it would encourage participants to think deeply about their experiences and relay this using a reflective tool. This was inspired by Edwards and I’Anson’s (2020) research that explored their pharmacy students’ views of their programme through artefact representation. These students were asked to bring three artefacts with them to an interview: a picture, an object, and a song.

For this study on effective mentoring participants were asked to bring along an artefact to the discussion/interview – this could be an object, photo, or maybe a song title that they feel sums up their experience of effective mentoring. During the interview or focus group mentors and student teachers were asked:

*What artefact have you brought with you today that sums up your experience of effective mentoring? Please explain why you have brought this and how it is related to your experience of mentoring?*

As data collection continued it became increasingly apparent that the artefact question allowed participants to talk freely and openly about their experiences and views of mentoring (Mannay, 2020). All participants brought or referred to something and were able to relate a personal anecdote to their discussion when explaining their choices. This made for varied and interesting discussion and was a clear success in terms of the artefact as a facilitating tool in research methodology. It is interesting to note that out of 23 participants only two mentioned the same artefact (the song ‘The Climb’ by Miley Cyrus). Table 4.1 summarises the different artefacts referred to by participants and more detail can be found in Appendix D; with examples of the artefacts and the commentary supplied by mentors and student teachers included throughout the discussion of findings.
Table 4.1: Summary of student teachers’ and mentors’ artefacts**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Artefact</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>M1</td>
<td>Coaster</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M2</td>
<td>Song – ‘Let it be’ by The Beatles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M3</td>
<td>Poppet toy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M4</td>
<td>Atticus Finch from ‘To Kill a Mockingbird’ by Harper Lee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M5</td>
<td>Tea bag</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M6</td>
<td>Bar of chocolate (Dairy Milk)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M7</td>
<td>Bicycle tool</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M8</td>
<td>Song – ‘The future’s so bright I gotta wear shades’ by Timbuk 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M9</td>
<td>Songs – ‘The Climb’ by Miley Cyrus; ‘Don’t Stop Believing’ by Journey; ‘A little help from my friends’ by Joe Cocker</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M10</td>
<td>Quote – “laughter is timeless” – Walt Disney</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S1a</td>
<td>Light bulb</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S1b</td>
<td>Song – ‘Nina Cried Power’ by Hozier</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S1c</td>
<td>Song – ‘The Climb’ by Miley Cyrus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S1d</td>
<td>Plant (small orchid)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S1e</td>
<td>Mug with ‘Teachers inspire minds’ slogan on it</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S2a</td>
<td>Reading glasses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S2b</td>
<td>Book</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S2c</td>
<td>Notebook cover with saying – ‘It takes a big heart to shape little minds’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S2d</td>
<td>Thumbs up squishy stress toy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S3a</td>
<td>A spring</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S3b</td>
<td>Picture of a plant being watered</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S4a</td>
<td>Image of scaffolding on a book called ‘6 Scaffolding Strategies to use with your students’ by Rebecca Alber</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S4c</td>
<td>‘Fighting my corner’</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*There were four focus groups. ** More detail on all artefacts and comments included in Appendix D.

Artefacts served as metaphors to express the magnitude which the role of mentoring encompasses. What mentors and mentees brought to the discussion served to highlight the following aspects of the mentor-mentee dynamic.

4.4 The mentor’s role and responsibilities

There was a clear appreciation acknowledged by participants that the role of the mentor is a varied and often challenging one. One which carried a heavy weight of professional responsibility. This was clearly articulated through a mentor’s decision to attend their interview dressed as Spiderman. Not only because it was World Book Day but because they wanted to illustrate how a mentor needs to show a mentee the way and should lead by example showing them that it is ok to take risks and make a fool of themselves. They were clearly aware of the powerful influence the mentor had over the student teacher early on in their career and were at pains to emphasise the need to embrace that role and challenge.
Another mentor acknowledged this through a coaster which read ‘I’m a Teacher what’s your Superpower?’ highlighting the role teachers undertake on a daily basis and one which student teachers are choosing to partake in as they pursue their PGCE qualification and ultimately their first steps into a career in teaching. Case studies 3 and 8 offer further insight on this theme.

‘It’s a coaster [...] it was a gift from my very first student teacher. At the time [there was] an inside joke about teachers having to sort of be superheroes. It’s one of those things you can never be truly prepared for and how what we do on a day to day basis is sometimes indescribable [...] I am reminded that what we do is really clever.’

The mentor’s role in this process is therefore seen as pivotal. The fact that this artefact was a gift to the mentor from their first student teacher emphasises the influential role, and indeed lasting impact, which mentors have on the student teacher. It also alludes to the powerful relationship which mentors build with their mentees. The weight of responsibility was clearly felt by a number of mentors. One mentor articulated the role and influence they play through their artefact, a popular toy called a Poppet:

‘I just feel that this symbolises when you’re mentoring somebody, the starting point really of where they are. Each little bubble is part of their potential and your job as a mentor is to unlock their full potential so that you can pop up as many of the little domes as you possibly can. I feel that is one of the main roles unlocking their full potential.’

In this reflection it is clear to see how the artefact enabled the mentor to clearly explain the role they play in helping their student teacher ‘to unlock their full potential’. It also made for an effective articulation of the process of mentoring in that it is seen as a step-by-step approach; ‘each little bubble’, and one which if done right over time will ultimately allow the mentor to support the student teacher to become the best teacher they can be ‘pop up as many of the little domes as you possibly can…. unlocking their full potential’.

This combined reflection of mentoring as role and a responsibility was echoed by a student teacher who brought a spring as an artefact. They considered the role the mentor plays in challenging student teachers to reach their potential ‘to stretch you’ while acknowledging the power they have to pause and reflect when needed in order to ensure student teachers are fully supported but not overstretched or put under strain.

‘A mentor is supposed to stretch you, and also too much can be done like this but you go back and get caught within the energy of the school, that you can be stretched but not too much.’
A number of student teachers’ reflections echoed the sentiment that mentors had a positive effect on them; whether that be through their approach or mindset or through their ability to continue to inspire them. This was illustrated by a student teacher who brought a light bulb.

“This is not just any light bulb, but one that has a dimmer and disco lights. This sums up my mentor as they kept my kind of spark and enthusiasm. They did an amazing job working with me and keeping that spark in me alive.”

The student clearly acknowledged their mentor’s role in keeping their ‘spark and enthusiasm…alive’. Noting the mentor’s responsibility in nurturing the ‘spark’ and continuing to encourage student teachers to stick with it.

This was aptly echoed by a mentor who chose the song ‘The future’s so bright I gotta wear shades’ by Timbuk3.

The future’s so bright I gotta wear shades ... ‘it’s about identifying the next people to carry that flame on and making sure what you’ve learnt can be passed on. You also nurture their own spark because everyone brings something else.’

The mentor recognised their role in supporting and enthusing their student teacher and indeed finding what makes them unique and developing it. They acknowledge the underlying responsibility mentors have for nurturing the next generation of teachers. There is also a clear indication of the reciprocal relationship which the mentor-mentee have.

In this way, these artefacts portrayed the mentor as an influential and guiding hand, facilitating challenge and offering support where needed. A great responsibility, and as making a lasting impression on the future teaching generation.
4.5 The qualities of an effective mentor

As with the many roles and responsibilities of being a mentor, the research highlighted the required qualities to complete the mentoring role effectively.

4.5.1 Personal qualities

One mentor referred to the personal qualities required for the role. This mentor, a Secondary English teacher, compared the qualities to those of the character of Atticus Finch from the book ‘To Kill a Mockingbird.’ The role of a mentor was personified by the qualities possessed by the character, such as patience and kindness. Atticus Finch strongly advocates equality which is also a quality required by an effective mentor and one could also consider Atticus Finch as a role-model to his children, exactly as a mentor would be to their students.

An artefact choice from a student referred to a mug which highlighted the importance of positive reinforcement, and, whilst acknowledging that the role of a mentor does require a reflective approach, that being willing to provide praise is needed. In this instance, the mentor bought the mug with the inspirational teacher quote as a gift for the student who was inspiring others through their creative and engaging lessons and experiences for the pupils.

‘It’s a mug that my mentor bought me and it’s just like one of those - our teachers inspire minds little mugs. [My mentor said] although it’s like one of those cheesy mugs, it did make [them] think of me and that I try to inspire and that made me feel like a mentor should ... like give you those kind of compliments where they are there and say those kind of things to you because we all like compliments. That’s why we give praise to the children and positive reinforcement. So I think that’s important as well for a mentor to give praise.’
4.5.2 Empathy and relatability

In addition, other qualities were identified as being significant to the role. Empathy, relatability, and the skill to view the practice learning experience from a student’s perspective and what they are ‘going through’ became apparent as required qualities. Also, the attribute of being able to scaffold students with a specific form of support while they master the skill of becoming qualified teachers. This was also recognised as a characteristic of an effective mentor.

Another student agreed with the notion of a mentor scaffolding support for a student, and went on to add that they consider an effective mentor to be someone that ‘fights their corner’ and provides support in a constructive and encouraging manner. As another student mentioned, it is important to identify the areas of praise during lesson observations whilst also highlighting the areas of development.

All of the attributes discussed during interviews and focus groups mirrored those raised by others (Welsh Government, 2019a; Parker, Zenkov and Glaser, 2021). The importance of the positive relationship between the mentor and mentee and thus the potential for relatability and empathy are particularly critical (Trevethan, 2017; Aderbigbe, Gray and Colucci-Gray, 2018).

4.5.3 A support network

Building on from the theme of scaffolding, was the song choice ‘a little help from my friends’ from a mentor which is reference to the support network which surrounds a student, especially during challenging times. One student teacher also supported this theme with their artefact taking the form of a thought that the mentor is ‘fighting my corner’. An effective mentor can additionally recognise expertise in other members of the network and facilitate specific support for students.

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Another student chose a notebook with the slogan ‘it takes a big heart to shape little minds’ as the artefact as representing effective mentoring. Even though the expression is self-explanatory, the student reiterated how a mentor does not only share knowledge with their student, but they also shape that knowledge into effective teaching. And it is through successful communication and a collaborative approach that mentors achieve this.
4.6 Effective approaches to mentoring

There was agreement amongst mentors that there are many aspects to the mentoring process but that it requires a holistic approach in order to be effective and have lasting impact. Mentors and student teachers discussed the different elements that they thought to be effective within this holistic approach. Offering emotional support was viewed as being key by many, which emphasises the importance of an effective relationship between the mentor and mentee, as discussed in the previous sections too.

_I think that the most effective mentoring is when a relationship is established and then the student has a respect for their mentor but equally the mentor has respect for that student and values that that student is just starting out._

(School Co-ordinator reflection)

Some specific tools and characteristics of effective mentoring frequently referred to by mentors and mentees during discussions included:

- Lesson observations and feedback
- Target setting
- Reflection
- Questioning
- Modelling
- Lesson planning support
- Frequent contact
- Mentee-led

In the very first mentor interview the mentor used their chosen artefact (a bar of Dairy Milk chocolate) to illustrate the holistic approach of mentoring. The participant took a macro and a micro approach to their response. They referred to the personal fulfilment; ‘great experience’ one gets from being a mentor and used their artefact to clearly illustrate the layers which exist beneath the surface of that experience. They reflected on the need to break things down into manageable chunks to increase their impact, to take it slowly and methodically rather than all in one go. There was clear acknowledgement of the range of techniques mentors have at their disposal but they also asserted that like the chocolate ‘lots of little bits... go together to make it a holistic approach’.

This multifaceted stance was echoed by the mentor who brought a bicycle tool as their artefact. Stating that: ‘There are lots of different aspects to the bicycle-tool... Mentoring is like this – there are different ways of doing things/ different approaches that can be used to support a mentor session or the discussion following a lesson’. As such it was clear that these mentors acknowledged the range of approaches which could be used to support student teachers and thereby confirmed the notion that mentoring is a complex and multi-faceted role (see also case studies 7 and 9). The application of different approaches is supported by others who agree that effective mentoring is achieved by
modelling, planning and ensuring there is reflection (Mena, Hennissen and Loughran, 2017; Estyn, 2018; Ellis, Alonzo and Nguyen, 2020; Badia and Clarke, 2021).

Some mentors focused on specific approaches that they had found to be effective. One mentor spoke of the need to ‘Let it be’ taking inspiration from his artefact, the song ‘Let it Be’ by the Beatles. They spoke to the importance of making mistakes and learning from those experiences (see also case studies 2 and 5). They cited their own experience ‘I still have lessons that go horribly wrong weekly, you know, and you just learn from that experience’.

Songs were a popular choice of artefact among student teachers and mentors. The lyrics often enabled participants to articulate their ideas in a succinct manner. This was evident in the student reflection outlined here:

| Nina cried power … ‘this verse is descriptive of the process of being in a mentor /mentee relationship….
It’s not the wakin’, it’s the risin’
It’s the groundin’ of a foot
uncompromisin’
It’s not foregoin’ of the lie, it’s not the openin’ of the eyes
It’s not the wakin’ it’s the risin’,
it’s not the shade we should be casting
It’s the light, it’s the obstacle that casts it.’ |

Here, the student teacher used the lyrics to identify the way mentors both support and challenge them to improve and grow. They realised that mentors do this consciously but ‘in an uncompromising way’ to support the student teacher’s professional development allowing growth ‘with them….and beyond them’.

In summary, the use of the artefact was a powerful research tool for this study, in that it enabled the participants to discuss their views with authority, grounding their words in personal experience and specific examples. As outlined, this allowed for focused and often enlightening responses regarding mentoring and the role of the mentor within ITE.
4.7 Barriers to mentoring

The complexities around mentoring were evident when a number of different barriers to its effectiveness were mentioned during the interviews and focus groups. The most prevalent barriers were effective training, sufficient time to complete the role, not having a positive relationship and the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic. Figure 4.1 provides a summary of the more frequently mentioned barriers. In addition to these significant barriers, many participants mentioned the challenges they faced with understanding the technology that supports the programme with ‘OneFile’, ‘SharePoint’ and ‘Iris Connect’ featuring. There was discussion around staffing difficulties, completion of paperwork, understanding the new PGCE programme itself, and keeping abreast with the national reform in terms of ITE requirements and the Curriculum for Wales.

![Diagram showing barriers to mentoring]

Figure 4.1: An overview of the main barriers to mentoring as reported by mentors.

The larger font size indicates the barriers referred to most frequently.

With over twenty-five separate comments made by mentors as to the importance of sufficient time in the effectiveness of mentoring, it is evident that the impact of this is far reaching.

‘They [mentors] are not engaging fully because they haven’t got time because there are other pressures.’

(Curriculum Tutor focus group)

Insufficient time impacts on how deeply mentors can engage with the training material, how frequently they can provide feedback to student teachers, how much they can engage in dialogical conversations and how much they can invest in collaborative planning. Such views reiterate the findings of others who comment that there is concern regarding the lack of time available for mentors to engage with the required training materials and the quality of any training materials is also critical (Parker, Zenkov and Glaser, 2021; Aderbigbe, Gray and Colucci-Gray, 2018; Milton et al., 2020; Forster et al., 2021).
One school co-ordinator acknowledged the importance of collaboration and explained how time impacted the mentor.

‘When you do meet with those students, you do have to stay behind, or it would usually be the teacher’s PPA that is taken up talking to the student.’
(School Co-ordinator reflection)

This was a view that resonated with other mentors even though schools are renumerated to provide mentors with the time needed for their involvement with the professional development of student teachers

‘I know schools are paid money, but very often that money gets swallowed up by various other things.’
(Mentor interview)

In addition to time being a barrier to effective mentoring, not having a positive relationship was also an important factor that was frequently mentioned. The case studies illustrate how different schools approach mentoring, including how deeply the concept of positive relationships support learning. This is particularly evident in Case studies 4, 6, 7 and 10. Building a positive relationship appears to underpin the ability to build trust, collaborate, discuss, receive feedback, and engage fully in the development process. One school mentor explained further that not ‘getting along with your student’ can be a barrier to everyone’s progress, leading us to consider the impact on the school community itself.

Another barrier to effective mentoring reported was Covid-19 and it is important to acknowledge the far-reaching impact and legacy that it has left behind so that lessons are learnt.

‘Covid-19 has been a barrier, it has meant that schools have been short of staff and then [remaining] staff have been stretched more thinly, meaning less time for students to be fully supported.’
(Practice Tutor reflection)

It is evident that the pandemic has exacerbated barriers such as time, which have impacted on the quality of relationships, ability to engage with training materials, the capacity to understand additional new online learning platforms, alongside individual personal difficulties. The literature reminds us that innovation can come from periods of challenge and that Covid-19 instigated a need for innovation in a real-life context. It demanded a renewed focus on the importance of personal relationships and enabled mentors to innovate with the use of remote technology to support change in mentoring processes.
4.7.1 Mentor training

A significant barrier to effective mentoring was training in some form and this is broken down further into not being able to access the training material, time to engage with the content and being able to fully understand the material. One student teacher recalled the impact of their mentor’s lack of training;

‘That was the problem with my first mentor. [They] had not gone to the training and [they weren’t] logged in to anything’.
(Student teacher focus group)

Another student reported that their mentor felt that they did not need to engage with the training as they had been mentoring for some time. They added that there was a danger with this mindset in not being able to keep up with important developments, given the changes in the educational landscape in Wales at the current time. Some interviewees also expressed difficulty with the ‘complexity of the course’, ‘understanding the programme’, ‘the need for IT training’, ‘access to supporting information and forms’, and ‘understanding the new programme requirements’.

‘Training focusing on how to ‘discuss’, what questions to ask and how to build positive relationships would also be beneficial.’
(School Co-ordinator reflection)

It is apparent that these factors could have been mitigated by access to and engagement with the training materials. Although there are opportunities to complete asynchronous mentor training, attend regular ‘mentoring matters’ sessions delivered by Curriculum Tutors and mentor meetings, if school-based mentors are not afforded the time to engage with the materials, it is a barrier that will remain a real challenge. It is therefore crucial that school-based mentors are provided with the tools to conduct effective mentoring. In awarding a sufficient amount of time, to mentors who possess the right skills, knowledge and experiences, they are supported in leading their own professional learning to support the development of student teachers.
5. Conclusion and recommendations

This study has helped to understand the range of effective mentoring approaches evident across the Open University Initial Teacher Education Partnership PGCE Programme. The creation of ten case studies, informed by the study, showcase effective mentoring in practice as they reflect the range of contexts and approaches across the bilingual Initial Teacher Education Partnership, which is engaging with schools across the whole of Wales.

Altogether 31 participants (student teachers, mentors, Practice Tutors, School Co-ordinators and Curriculum Tutors) contributed to the study between January and March 2022. Participants took part in either an interview, discussion group or submitted an audio/written reflection. There were high levels of engagement from participants, which reflected the need for the study and the level of interest in co-constructing mentoring resources to support future practice.

A literature review highlighted the broad range of approaches to mentoring in Teacher Education and that no one size fits all. Nevertheless, understanding the roles and responsibilities is key to provide clarity of expectation for any mentoring relationship and the pairing of mentors and mentees needs to be undertaken with careful matching. Allocation of time for mentors is critical in ensuring they have adequate time to complete their mentoring responsibilities, including appropriate training.

This study’s findings presents many similar threads, as reiterated in the supporting literature, participants report a range of approaches to mentoring within their individual school context. Mentoring is a broad term and can be a demanding role that requires time and space to develop and learn (both from research and practice). Student teachers also emphasise the importance of working with mentors who have volunteered for the role as opposed to them having the role forced upon them.

A range of personal qualities are reported to be critical for those undertaking the mentor’s role; including patience, positivity, empathy and relatability. There is a clear indication of the existence of a reciprocal relationship with the mentor – mentee, and that relationship can have a significant impact on the effectiveness of the mentoring taking place.

Mentors report that supporting a student teacher can keep them up to date. Mentors also apply their own experiences of previous mentoring to the process, and the training and leadership opportunities available are reported to be valuable for mentors’ professional learning and career development. The mentors who are most open to enhancing their own professional development appear to have the most appreciation of current reforms regarding their role in the context of ITE reform in Wales at present.

There is agreement that there are many aspects to mentoring but it requires a holistic approach. Tools such as lesson observation, feedback, target setting, questioning and modelling are reported to be effective by all participants. With learning from mistakes also acknowledged as important for student teachers.

Some of the key barriers and challenges to effective mentoring include making certain that all appropriate mentor training is completed. However, there can be a lack of sufficient time to complete the training and the responsibilities of the role. A particularly significant factor in the success of any...
mentoring process is the necessity for a positive relationship between the mentor and mentee, as this supports the building of a trusting relationship.

Using artefacts as a research tool to stimulate discussion proved very effective in eliciting quality responses from participants. Participants engaged enthusiastically with the process and spoke with confidence, relating their views to personal experiences.

5.1 Recommendations

- Further research could be considered to ascertain the detail regarding the mentoring models in place across OU Partnership schools. This would help to inform ongoing support for school-based mentors.
- Additional information regarding the personal attributes and responsibilities required of mentors could be shared with schools to support their allocation of the roles.
- The OU Partnership and schools could consider introducing support to ensure that mentoring is addressed at a whole school level; this would include some investment (e.g. time to complete required training/ protected mentor meeting time). And updated partnership training materials to support mentoring should reflect this study’s findings (e.g. suggestions and examples of effective tools and approaches to use).
- The case studies showcasing examples of effective practice in mentoring in ITE can be shared with the partnership and wider ITE community. The co-construction of these should be celebrated.
References


The Open University (2022a) A new way to become a teacher. Available at: https://www.open.ac.uk/courses/choose/wales/pgce

The Open University (2022b) Postgraduate Certificate in Education in Wales. Available at: https://www.open.ac.uk/postgraduate/qualifications/k36


Appendix A: Discussion and interview schedules

Student teacher schedule for discussion group

Introduction: Researcher/s introduce themselves to the group, explain that the intention for the discussion is to gather student teachers’ views on effective mentoring approaches they have experienced and understand their views on what they think the key factors for effective mentoring are and any suggestions they have to improve mentoring.

Reaffirm they have consented to participate and gave permission to record the discussion, remind the group that this will only be used for the purposes of this research and will be destroyed once the project is complete.

Note to researcher/s: Please prioritise questions 1-4 and 10, if time allows gather the group’s views on questions 5-9.

1. Why did you want to be involved in this research project?
   Prompts: Why are you here?
   What do you hope to gain from this research experience?
   What do you see as the benefits of being involved in this type of project?

2. What do you consider to be the role of the mentor?
   Prompts: Why do you think someone decides to be a mentor to ITE students?
   What do you see as their responsibilities in this role?

3. What artefact have you brought with you today that sums up your experience of effective mentoring? Please explain why you have brought this and how is related to your experience of mentoring?
   Prompts: How is this related to effective mentoring in your view?
   Why did you choose this type of artefact?
   Feel free to ask each other about what you have brought today.
   This is a chance to explain what you think symbolised effective mentoring and why.

4. What do you consider to be successful or effective approaches used by mentors?
   Prompts: Which tools or strategies do you find work well and why?
   Are there particular approaches you experience on a regular basis?
   How are lesson observations feedback given?
   How are your targets set?
   What do you see as good / effective qualities in a mentor / mentoring session?

5. Think back to your most recent mentoring session. Tell us about this meeting.
   Prompts: How did you approach this meeting?
   What did you include?
6. Did you plan ahead for this mentoring session?
   Prompts: How did you plan for the mentoring session?
   What was included?
   What did you use at the basis for your planning?
   What did you refer to? Observations? OU study? Research literature?

7. If you were encountering difficulties, how could a mentor support you?
   Prompts: What type of support do you think can be needed?
   Where would you seek this support/ Who would you contact?
   How would you engage the mentor in this process?

8. What do you think are the main barriers to mentoring ITE students?
   Prompts: What doesn’t work as well?
   What issues have you come across?
   What are the barriers to being an effective mentor in your view?

9. How aware is your mentor about the nature of the full OU PGCE in Wales course requirements?
   Prompts: How much does your mentor know about the online study you undertake?
   How much do they know about the seminars you attend and what happens within them?
   How aware are they about the varied demands you have on you as an OU student undertaking this pathway to teaching?

10. Moving forward, what would help to improve your experience in terms of the student-mentor relationship / role?
    Prompts: Do you have any suggestions?
    What would you like to have more experience of?
    How could this be done?
School Mentor interview schedule

Introduction: Researcher/s introduce themself, explain that the intention for the discussion is to gather mentors’ views on effective mentoring approaches and understand their views on what they think the key factors for effective mentoring are and any suggestions they have to improve mentoring.

Reaffirm they have consented to participate and gave permission to record the discussion, reminder that this will only be used for the purposes of this research and will be destroyed once the project is complete.

Note to researchers: Please prioritise questions 1-5, and 11; if time allows gather the mentor’s views on questions 6-10.

1. What drew you to this research project? Why did you want to be involved in this research project?
   Prompts: Why are you here?
   Why do you hope to gain from this research experience?
   What do you see as the benefits of being involved in this type of project?

2. What do you consider is your role as a mentor for student teachers in ITE?
   Prompts: Why are you a mentor?
   What do you hope to achieve as a mentor?
   What do you see as your responsibilities as a mentor?

3. What artefact have you brought with you today that sums up your experience of effective mentoring? Could you explain why you have brought this and how is related to your experience of mentoring?
   Prompts: Why did you choose this type of artefact?

4. What do you consider to be successful or effective approaches to mentoring ITE students and why?
   Prompts: Which tools or strategies do you find work well and why?
   Are there particular approaches you use on a regular basis?
   How do you approach lesson observations and give feedback? How do you set targets?

5. What do you think are the most effective professional learning/methods for training/upskilling mentors for the role of mentoring ITE?
   Prompts: Did you engage with the OU online training materials?
   Did you attend any development events?
   Have you accessed the resources on SharePoint? How easy do you find the observation forms/reports to use?
   Have you had contact with your Curriculum Tutor?
   Have you engaged with/ worked with the School Co-Ordinator with regards to this role?
6. Think back to your most recent mentoring session. What happened at that meeting?
   Prompts: How did you approach this meeting?
            What did you include?
            Were there any specific tools or strategies you adopted and why?

7. Did you plan ahead for this mentoring session/ or are mentor sessions mentee-led?
   Prompts: How did you plan for the mentoring session/ how did you decide to use a
            mentee-led approach?
            What was included?
            What did you use as the basis for your planning?
            What did you refer to? Student observations/ OU documentation and
            guidance/ Research literature?

8. How would you go about supporting a student teacher who appears to be falling behind or in
    danger of not meeting the standards for QTS?
   Prompts: What approaches would you use to support the student?
            What would you put in place/ Who would you contact?
            How would you engage the student in this process?

9. What do you envisage are the barriers to mentoring ITE students?
   Prompts: What doesn’t work as well?
            What issues have you come across?
            What are the barriers to being an effective mentor?

10. Where do you feel that your knowledge and expertise as a mentor have come from?
    Prompts: Have you done any mentor related / focused training?
             When was this? How did you apply your training to role?

11. Moving forward, what would help to improve your effectiveness as a mentor for ITE students?
    Prompts: What further training needs do you have? Are there any gaps in your
             knowledge?
Practice Tutor and School Co-Ordinator guidance for reflection

Thank you for supporting the mentoring research. The aim of the project is to develop case studies of effective mentoring in initial teacher education. These will be created by combining the findings from a group discussion with student teachers, interviews with school mentors and a discussion with The Open University Tutors on their experiences of mentoring. It is important to understand the Practice Tutor and school co-ordinator’s views and to gather this information we would like you to submit a short reflection please.

This may be in writing or recorded, according to whichever you would prefer.

Please submit your reflection to [insert name/email address], by [insert date].
If you have any queries please contact [insert name /email address].

Please use the following to help structure your reflection.

1. Your experiences of mentoring [e.g. Why is it important for you /your school to support ITE? How are mentors selected in your school? How involved are you in mentoring (mentoring your mentors)?]

2. What examples of effective mentoring have you seen from mentors? [What has worked well and why?]

3. What do you envisage are the barriers to mentoring ITE students in schools? [How could these be addressed in the future?]

4. What professional learning/ training needs can you identify within your setting to support mentoring? [How can the partnership support this moving forward? Have you engaged with any of the professional learning materials? How important is it for your school to be involved in action research?]

Thank you
Curriculum Tutor schedule for discussion group

Introduction: Researcher/s introduce themselves to the group, explain that the intention for the discussion is to gather Curriculum Tutors’ views on effective mentoring approaches and understand their views on what they think the key factors for effective mentoring are and any suggestions they have to improve mentoring.

Reaffirm they have consented to participate and gave permission to record the discussion, remind the group that this will only be used for the purposes of this research and will be destroyed once the project is complete.

Note to researcher/s: Please prioritise questions 1-5, if time allows gather the group’s views on questions 6-8.

1. What drew you to this research project? Why did you want to be involved in this research project?
   Prompts: Why are you here?
             What do you hope to gain from this research experience?
             What do you see as the benefits of being involved in this type of project?
             Do you see this as a necessary research area?

2. What do you consider to be the role of the mentor?
   Prompts: Why do you think someone decides to be a mentor to ITE students?
             What do you see as their responsibilities in this role?

3. Think back to the Mentor Session Records that you have read. What stands out and why?
   Prompts: How did mentors appear to approach these meetings?
             What did they include/What did they focus on?
             How did they engage with the format of the form to reflect what was included in the session?
             Was there evidence of forward planning for these sessions?

4. [Images from the Mentoring Mindset Module shared to support this question]
   What do you consider to be successful or effective approaches used by mentors?
   Prompts: Which tools or strategies do you find work well and why?
             Are there particular approaches you experience on a regular basis?
             How are lesson observations feedback given?
             How are your targets set?
             What do you see as good/effective qualities in a mentor/mentoring session?

5. What do you think are the most effective professional learning materials/methods for training/upskilling mentors for the role of mentoring ITE?
   Prompts: Have your mentors engaged with the OU online training materials?
             Did they attend any development events?
             Have they accessed the resources on SharePoint?
             Have they had contact with you? To your knowledge, have they engaged with/ worked with the School Co-Ordinator with regards to this role?
6. If you had a student who was falling behind or struggling and in possible danger of not meeting the standard for QTS - How would you expect a mentor to provide support?
   Prompts:   What support do you think a student would need?
               What would you like to see put in place?
               Who would you expect to be contacted / included?
               How would you engage the mentor and student in this process?

7. What do you envisage are the barriers to mentoring ITE students?
   Prompts:   What doesn’t work as well?
               What issues have you come across?
               What are the barriers to being an effective mentor in your view?

8. Moving forward, what would help to improve your role as a curriculum tutor in supporting effective mentoring for ITE students?
   Prompts:   What further training needs do you think mentors need?
               Are there any gaps in their knowledge?
               How can these be addressed?
# Appendix B: Mentoring module overview

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Modules</th>
<th>Brief description</th>
<th>Guiding questions</th>
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| Module 1: Inquiry, Professional Development Schools (PDSs), and Partnerships | • Provide a context for mentoring efforts.  
• Set the stage for developing inquiry as a tool for practitioners.  
• Engage in activities such as development of a mentor teacher readiness tool and partnership exploration. | • What is inquiry?  
• Why do we need partnerships and PDSs for teacher preparation and professional development?  
• In what ways does working with teacher candidates or first-year teachers impact your students’ learning and/or your own professional development—as a classroom teacher, as a mentor for preservice or in-service teachers, or both? |
| Module 2: Co-planning, Coteaching, and Gradual Release of Responsibilities | • Introduce co-planning and coteaching.  
• Explored applications of coteaching models.  
• Engage mentors in activities that support planning and implementing a lesson using a coteaching model. | • How do you co-plan/coteach with a teacher candidate, new teacher, or a veteran colleague?  
• How do you gradually release teaching responsibilities to teacher candidate?  
• How do you support teacher candidates struggling to balance the new duties of their roles?  
• What initial data are you gathering to address the question of the impact of mentoring on students’ learning and your development? |
| Module 3: Giving Feedback via Face-to-Face and Video Modes | • Explore experiences with giving and receiving feedback.  
• Engage mentors in readings and activities related to coaching cycles  
• Support mentors in a coaching/feedback cycle with either a peer or a teacher candidate. | • How do you give effective feedback to teacher candidates and new teachers in traditional, face-to-face modes?  
• How do you give effective feedback to teacher candidates and new teachers via video coding platforms?  
• What data are you gathering to address the question of the impact of mentoring on students’ learning and teachers’ development? |
| Module 4: Navigating Difficult Conversations | • Explore strategies for having difficult conversations with teacher candidates and their teaching peers.  
• Support mentor teachers with activities that develop skills for navigate difficult professional conversations. | • How do you navigate difficult conversations with teacher candidates?  
• How do guide teacher candidates to reflect deeply and candidly on their practice and development?  
• What data are you gathering to address the question of the impact of mentoring on students’ learning and teachers’ development?  
• What are your initial findings related to the impact of mentoring on students’ learning and your development? |
| Module 5: Tying it All Together | • Summarize experience.  
• Analyse data collected as part of over-arching inquiry. | • What findings can we draw from the data we have gathered on the impact of mentoring on students’ learning and your development?  
• How and with whom will you share a summary of this impact?  
• How will you continue to reflect on and examine your clinical faculty/mentor role? |

(Parker, Zenkov and Glaser, 2021, p. 69)
**Appendix C: Case studies**

The schools, their location and the theme of each case study.

[All the following case studies are available [here](#) in a separate document]

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**The school**

Burry Port Community Primary School is in Carmarthenshire, south west Wales.

- Currently 39 per cent of all pupils are eligible for free school meals.
- Nearly all pupils are white British. A few pupils have English as an additional language and very few speak Welsh at home (Estyn, 2014).

The school has mentored student teachers from different universities across the region for many years. Since September 2021, the school has supported one salaried student teacher’s placements as part of The Open University Partnership.

**Mentoring student teachers**

The school sees the potential in everyone and believes that everyone in the organisation has something to offer. They want to ensure that the potential of developing teachers and leaders is nurtured and is not lost.

Student teachers are supported by mentoring and coaching methods that are applied appropriately, depending on the student teacher’s experience, their progress and the context of the discussion.

The importance of reflection is reinforced by the school. Student teachers are given time to reflect on their practice before discussions where the mentor uses coaching and growth model styles of support i.e. ‘What’s your current issue? Let’s prioritise! How can we break this down? What I hear is that you’re saying…….have you thought about doing more of…?’

Ensuring that student teachers feel safe to make mistakes and take risks is of importance to the school’s mentoring approach.

As a Mentor, you’re going into it because you love seeing the student have that first light bulb moment. It’s worth all the effort you put into it, and then you think, right, they’re in this for the vocation now, it’s not a job. As long as it’s a priority for both of you, then it’s going to be successful no matter what happens in the school day or how busy things are.

Student teachers are supported with the balance of employment, practice learning and module studies. Expectations are managed in a reassuring and realistic manner whilst maintaining transparency on the profession’s requirements.

The school values the importance of research projects and student teachers are encouraged to record themselves teaching and watch it back. Giving student teachers the opportunity to watch themselves and watch the children’s learning is an interesting and effective strategy to gaining more knowledge of practice.

Mentor and student teacher ‘work alongside each other’ during lessons where the mentor works with groups of learners ‘what I’m picking up on about the children is helping me as a teacher to plan their learning as much as watching what [the student] is doing’.

Within the school, attachment is an important principle which students are encouraged to develop first before concentrating on their teaching. Understanding how to build those attachments and ensuring children feel safe in their classes is key.
**Case study 2:**

**Handing over the reins:**

**a student-centred approach**

**Coedpenmaen County Primary School**

**English-medium primary**

263 pupils

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**The school**

Coedpenmaen County Primary is Pontypridd, Rhondda Cynon Taf, South Wales.

- The school serves an area that is neither economically advantaged nor disadvantaged. About 16 per cent of pupils are eligible for free school meals, and approximately 13 per cent of pupils have additional learning needs (*Estyn, 2012*).

The school has mentored student teachers from different universities for many years. Since September 2020, the school has supported salaried and part-time student teachers as part of The Open University Partnership.

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**Mentoring student teachers**

Enjoying being a mentor and passing on knowledge to future teachers is a privilege and brings with it personal satisfaction and supports the mentor in their teaching role too.

Even though student teachers draw on the knowledge and skills of their more experienced mentors in the school, it is important that mentors ‘let the students have a go’. Some teachers can find this difficult as they ‘like to keep hold of things and keep control’.

The critical factor for student teachers is the ‘self-analysis’ and the mentor’s role is to help them to identify where they went wrong and what went well.

I find [being a mentor] supports me as well. I feel the students know more about the four core purposes and the new curriculum than I do. I’m hoping the next few years, that depending how well they’re taught by the universities, they will be very useful sources of information.

Student teachers are also supported to develop important ‘softer skills’; such as having healthy relationships with other members of staff – if these exist the job of a teacher is easier. This is achieved by ensuring student teachers are in the staff rooms.

Feedback on lessons is immediate as soon as the lesson finishes and the mentor usually begins the conversation with ‘How do you think that went?’ and similar to teaching the children other questions include – ‘What do you think was a good bit? Is there anything that you think you could do better?’

They [student teachers] have introduced new things to me. And I’ll think – ‘I’ve never seen that before, or that will work, that’s an interesting way of doing it’. But that will only happen if you are prepared to hand over the reins to them.

The mentor meetings are very ‘mentee-lead’, with the student teacher bringing tasks they need to complete to the sessions – such as areas that they require more evidence for and the mentor and student teacher work out what is required together.
The school

Eveswell Primary School is in Newport, South Wales.

- Most pupils live close to the school. Around 12 per cent of pupils are entitled to free school meals. English is the main home language for the majority of pupils (Estyn, 2014).
- Around 30 per cent of pupils come from an ethnic minority background. The school has identified nearly 14 per cent of pupils as having additional learning needs. Around 25 per cent of pupils receive support for English as an additional language (Estyn, 2014).

The school has mentored student teachers from different universities across the region for many years. Since September 2020, the school has supported two part-time student teachers’ placements as part of The Open University Partnership.

Mentoring student teachers

Mentoring is seen as an honour, something to be proud of and celebrate when the opportunity arises as it is an opportunity to share expertise with future teachers. The responsibility and impact mentors have on a student teacher’s early experiences is acknowledged and taken seriously by those who mentor student teachers in the school.

Building a relationship based on mutual trust and respect early on is seen as essential so that students know who they can turn to.

I think it’s important to be approachable, always on hand to offer advice and support when needed.

It’s important to get them [student teachers] out of their comfort zone, so that they embrace opportunities to develop their own growth mindset.

While mentors should give clear structure, guidance and support early on, there is a clear sense that student teachers should also be given space and time to make mistakes so that they might be used as learning opportunities and reflection points.

Mentors should encourage and challenge student teacher to step out of their comfort zone.

Feedback is identified as critical in the process in that it enables both short-term and long-term targets to be set. There is a focus on evaluating what went well, what did not, and what has been learnt from previous lessons to set focused and realistic targets. Honesty is seen as crucial to having real impact.

Mentor sessions are planned a week ahead so that student teachers can come prepared with what they need support on, ensuring this time is productive and meaningful.

The mentor – mentee relationship is seen as mutually beneficial in that the mentor can learn as much from observing the student teacher and their work in the class as the student teacher can learn from taking over.

Good mentors are identified as having a range of personal qualities:

- A sense of empathy – all teachers have been there!
- An ability to model; both in terms of teaching but also in how you behave and act and approach the role
- An approachable manner
- A good sense of humour
- Good listening skills
- An ability to put someone at ease
Case study 4:
Reciprocal learning during the mentor-student experience

Golftyn Primary School
English-medium primary
423 pupils

The school

Golftyn Primary School is in Connah’s Quay, Flintshire, north east Wales.

- Around 17 per cent of pupils are eligible for free school meals. The school has very few pupils who are looked after by the local authority (Estyn, 2016).
- About 13 per cent of pupils have additional learning needs. English is the main home language of most pupils. Very few pupils come from an ethnic minority background. No pupils use Welsh as their first language (Estyn, 2016).

The school has mentored student teachers for many years, and supported a part-time student teacher as part of The Open University Partnership since September 2021.

Mentoring student teachers

Mentoring is an opportunity to share experiences and learning. There is a need to create a comfortable and supportive environment and establish a trusting relationship. Talking about what went well is the easy part but having the relationship to discuss key areas for development and targets can be a challenge for all mentors. There is very much a sense of mutual learning. Staff acknowledge that despite many years in teaching that they are still learning and want student teachers to know that. There is a desire to share past experiences (both success and failure) and emphasise the learning opportunities from these. It is important to offer student teachers the strategies to overcome perceived failures for example: being able to adapt your lesson plan mid lesson should things not be going to plan.

Constructive feedback is necessary to support student teachers to move forward in their practice. But allowing them to reflect on their experience first is important before being critical or unpicking areas for development. Setting SMART targets is crucial in making small steps to success manageable.

There is a clear sense that mentoring skills, just like teaching and learning, need to be honed and developed over time but also revisited periodically by accessing training. There is an acknowledgement that there can be a reluctance by some experienced mentors to revisit and engage in training materials. However, this can be dangerous in that it can lead to stagnation and apathy and a lack of forward thinking and approach in terms of supporting the teachers (and thereby the pupils) of tomorrow.

It’s a two-way process and I feel that when you listen to them [student teachers], you’re helping them to reflect on their own teaching, and helping them learn from their mistakes. It’s important to share those experiences with whoever you’re mentoring, because then they know how you’ve overcome those failures and how it hasn’t stopped you because we’ve all had those lessons.

I do feel that sometimes mentors, if they have been doing it for a long time, don’t feel the need to engage in material. I think that’s the danger because things are moving and changing with the times. We’re teaching the children of today for tomorrow’s jobs and I feel everything’s evolving. So if we do things the same way we’ve always done them, there’s a danger of being a little bit stagnant and not moving with the times.

‘You’ve got to immerse yourself in all of the training materials available…. I never feel that I’ve got to that point where I don’t need to develop.’
Case study 5:
Embracing opportunities and challenges

Llanbister Primary School
English-medium primary
61 pupils

The school
Llanbister Primary School is in Powys.

- The three-year average for pupils eligible for free school meals is around two per cent (Estyn, 2019).
- Very few pupils speak English as an additional language or come from an ethnic minority background. No pupils speak Welsh at home. Around seven per cent of pupils are identified as having additional learning needs (Estyn 2019).

The school has supported a salaried student teacher as part of The Open University Partnership since September 2021.

Mentoring student teachers
Approaches to mentoring mirror approaches used in the classroom where student teachers are encouraged to:...
‘go out explore, investigate and come to their own pedagogical conclusions’.
These are then explored in a collaborative and safe environment where the student teacher is able to unpick their findings in supportive mentoring sessions.

Embracing opportunities
As a small rural school, the opportunity to mentor is not one that comes along very often and is seen as a chance to learn as well as to support the development of future teachers.

The mentor is seen as a guide who steers the student teacher in the right direction but also allows them space to develop by providing opportunity as well as challenge highlighting that mentors should also not be afraid to put students out of their comfort zone.

There is very much a growth mindset informed ethos which allows students to make their own mistakes and learn from them.

Embracing challenges
The challenge of timetabling is overcome for this small rural school with meticulous planning and clear communication with all. Honouring the hour for a mentor session is deemed crucial otherwise it would not happen. There is a clear positive attitude to immersing the student teacher development into the school.

Undertaking many roles within the school, the mentor is enabled to talk and support the student teacher on a range of issues and concepts with authority and experience. In a smaller environment there are less staff, but this can work as an advantage rather than a hindrance as all staff know all pupils and policy well and are able to offer support easily.

Responsibility for the student teacher is then shared and thus so is the workload. Mentors support class teachers and vice versa in observing and mentor sessions.

There is a clear feeling that staff can dedicate a lot of attention to supporting the student teacher despite perceptions that this would be a greater challenge in a school of this size ‘it’s not just my ideas as well, it’s that whole wider school support and sharing of ideas’.

It’s the same with children isn’t it? They don’t always learn in the same way and that’s the same for adults as well. But it’s good to have an arsenal, armouroy or something like that. It’s good to have these pieces of equipment in your toolbox.
Case study 6:
Collaborate, defend and protect

Maesteg School
11–18 English-medium
mixed comprehensive
1075 pupils

The school

Maesteg School is located to the north of Bridgend, South Wales.

- About a quarter of pupils are eligible for free school meals, with just over half of pupils living in the 20 per cent most deprived areas in Wales (Estyn, 2019).
- Just under a third of the pupils have a special educational need. A very small number have English as an Additional Language. There are very few pupils who speak Welsh at home (Estyn, 2019).

The school has mentored student teachers from different universities across the region for many years. Since September 2021, the school has supported four salaried student teachers’ placements as part of The Open University Partnership.

Mentoring student teachers

The school-based mentors operate a ‘my door is always open’ policy supported by a comforting hot beverage and a listening ear to help develop a mutual and respectful relationship.

There are varying aspects to the mentoring role, that require different approaches and sometimes different personas – ‘my observer and feedback persona is very different to my questioning persona and knowing when to apply them needs skill and tact’.

There is a responsibility to ‘care for’ and ‘do the best by’ the student teachers. The school has a culture of creating independent, self-reflective teachers who are ‘empowered individuals, confident enough to progress when they are established’. The mentors have a sense of responsibility toward the student teachers and to defend their best interests.

There’s an element of protection in mentoring and it’s important to safeguard them [the student teacher] from doing more than is required of them too soon. It is important that everyone is looking after them, until they find their feet.

I thought at the beginning that direct feedback was what I should be doing and I realised what I needed to be doing was encouraging the students to be reflective practitioners and to use everything that they’re seeing and doing with the Open University and the experience in the classroom to promote self-progress.

Having a student teacher encourages mentors to self-reflect on their own practice. Mentors use questions to facilitate thinking and promote self-reflection as opposed to giving direct instructions.

Collaboration involves supporting student teachers with the teaching they receive from the university to modelling the skills needed to deliver the GCSE curriculum. Team teaching and live coaching also improves practice and strengthens relationships.

There is collaboration between the mentor and school-co-ordinator, and working jointly with others towards shared goals can be very satisfying.

‘Team teaching can include jumping in and supporting when I think something needs to be built on, but not in a patronising way, just in a ‘I’m-in-the-room-and-can-help-you’ way.’
The school

Mount Pleasant Primary School is in Rogerstone, near Newport, South Wales.

- The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals is two per cent (Estyn 2018).
- Ten per cent of pupils have additional learning needs. Very few pupils have statements of special educational need. Most pupils are of white British ethnicity. Very few pupils speak Welsh at home (Estyn 2018).

The school has mentored student teachers for many years, and supported a salaried and a part-time student teacher as part of The Open University Partnership since September 2020.

Mentoring student teachers

Walt Disney’s ‘laughter is timeless’ reminds mentors, student teachers and pupils that laughter, **having fun** and a sense of humour is important for everyone. This mindset is also relevant in times of adversity, *‘even if things aren’t great, remember that it’s not the end of the world, and think ‘come on we can do this’”*. There is pride in student teachers feeling happy and connected as this can result in successful practice. Investing in the student teacher so that they feel valued and part of the school’s teaching team is important. **Lines of communication** are always open via, ‘open door policy’ and ‘just ask – that’s what we’re here for’, along with flexible drop ins and online meetings during Covid isolation times.

**Positive relationships** lead to effective collaboration and this encourages mentors to reflect on their own pedagogy. Student teachers are part of the school staff and this is supported by working with leadership groups across the school and student teachers being included in whole school INSET and training.

In addition to the daily learning conversations, formal mentoring sessions take place weekly to evaluate the student teacher’s progress against targets. It is an opportunity to engage with the **Professional Standards and self-reflections** from that week’s lessons. The mentor has checklists of ‘jobs’ to do, ensures all school resources are available, discusses research projects and looks for opportunities to build themes into lesson planning.

When writing Practice Learning Reports, the mentor finds **collaborating with other colleagues** such as the school co-ordinator, practice tutor and colleagues across the school helpful.
Case study 8:  
Developing independence and professional identity

Severn Primary School
English-medium primary
490 pupils

The school
Severn Primary is located close to the centre of Cardiff, South Wales.

- The school serves a multicultural community, approximately 23 per cent of pupils are White British (Estyn, 2016). There are 55 different languages and dialects spoken by pupils.
- About 24 per cent of pupils are eligible for free school meals (Estyn, 2016). Approximately 18 per cent of pupils have additional learning needs.

The school has mentored student teachers for many years, and supported a part-time student teacher as part of The Open University Partnership since September 2021.

Mentoring student teachers

Motivated by previous support received from others to develop professionally, the mentor welcomed the opportunity to help someone else with their career development. They draw on a range of mentoring approaches to provide support, but key to the whole process is not to be ‘over bearing’.

Some of the most important aspects of mentoring are for a mentor to:
- show good practice yourself
- make links with other teachers’ practice
- discuss possible approaches prior to a lesson
- evaluate the lesson afterwards

I’ve tried to give [the student teacher] a lot of space when they’re exploring ideas and teaching so that they find their own way and they are not trying to be a sort of carbon copy of me.

You are continually working with them, as you try to make sure they take some ownership and use their own strategies and ideas.

During the early stages of the placement, the mentor would offer suggestions as to how they would deliver an activity – as this is the familiarisation stage. So there would be examples and demonstrations. But then the mentor ‘steps back’ and encourages more ‘ownership of the lesson’ and also for the student teacher to take on the responsibility for organising resources.

Joint observations with the school co-ordinator are useful in supporting the mentoring process in the school. Along with receiving feedback from the Curriculum Tutor regarding the lesson observations completed.

The school invested in us, by giving us time in the school day. So we could approach it [mentoring] in a calm, non-hurried way without people interrupting us. This is very, very useful.

The school is very supportive of the mentoring role and allocated additional non-contact time once a fortnight for both the mentor and student teacher, providing a protected hour for focused mentoring activity.
Case study 9: Supporting a range of experiences for student teachers

The school

The John Frost School is located in the south-western part of Newport, South Wales.

- About a quarter of pupils are eligible for free school meals, with just over half of pupils living in the 20 per cent most deprived areas in Wales (Estyn, 2020).
- A third of pupils come from homes where English is not the main language and 40 per cent are from a minority-ethnic or mixed-race background (Estyn, 2020).

The school has mentored student teachers from different universities across the region for many years. Since September 2021, the school has supported two part-time student teachers as part of The Open University Partnership.

Mentoring student teachers

School-based mentors provide the ‘first port of call’ for student teachers when they have any queries or worries. Support with lesson planning can be particularly dominant for new student teachers.

It is equally as important to provide feedback on the proposed lesson plan and the delivery of the lesson. To deliver feedback effectively there are regular meetings between the student teacher and the mentor.

This regular contact includes a longer meeting at least once a week and incidental catch ups during the week too, as student teachers ‘really value a regular quick catching up or checking in’.

Student teachers also have opportunities to see other teachers in the department with a range of teaching styles teach, because it's easy to just allow a student to see their mentor or see teachers that are a bit like their mentor.

Student teachers are also supported by mentors with suggested reading and by taking part in whole school training activities.

Sometimes, during observations, mentors take part in the lesson as if they are one of the pupils. This is to see that they understand the instructions and what sort of discussion could take place on the lesson content, or to help identify any barriers to success. This can also help to provide the student teacher with ‘more authentic feedback’.

‘Acting out’ what happened during a lesson is also an approach used – particularly if something did not go to plan during a student teacher’s lesson. The mentor and the student teacher try different approaches to what could have been said or done in the lesson. The student draws on that experience the next time a similar instance arises.
Case study 10:
The importance of empathy and building relationships

Ysgol Gyfun Bryn Tawe
Welsh-medium 11-18 school
887 pupils

The school

Ysgol Gyfun Bryn Tawe is located in the north of Swansea.

- Just over 10 per cent of pupils are eligible for free schools meals (Estyn, 2019).
- Around 10 per cent of pupils come from Welsh-speaking homes and nearly all pupils speak Welsh fluently. Very few pupils come from ethnic minority backgrounds. No pupils speak English as an additional language (Estyn, 2019).

The school has mentored student teachers for many years. Since September 2021, the school has supported one part-time student teacher as part of The Open University Partnership.

Mentoring student teachers

Professional development and the teacher growth process are important factors of effective mentoring within the school. The school is keen to gain a broader understanding of the training provided for student teachers through their university studies to gain a more holistic view of the provision needed. In order to reinforce effective mentoring approaches, mentors engage thoroughly with the training materials. The mentor is considered a facilitator; they are bridging the gap between the student teacher and the classroom. Mentors share knowledge and experience with their student teachers and they also facilitate in helping the student teachers to build relationships.

Empathy: The school values giving early career teachers experience as mentors. Student teachers are given an experience where mentors demonstrate empathy towards their progress, rather than concentrating on sharing negative aspects of their practice.

With their own experiences as student teachers in mind, mentors demonstrate an ‘understanding of what students are going through’. Students are encouraged to develop their own teaching style and put their own ‘spin’ on practice. A mentor session is a dialogue between the mentor and the mentee. Student teachers are encouraged to use two coloured highlighter pens on their written feedback which represent ‘what went well’ and ‘improvements needed’. These form the focus for the development targets and emphasise strengths.

Relationships: Developing a strong mentor and student relationship is important for the school’s mentoring approach. Ensuring that student teachers feel comfortable enough to ‘open up’ during difficult times, and that they understand that the mentor is coming from a caring perspective is key to productive conversations. If a student was experiencing difficulties with their workload, empathy would be shown with an understanding of course commitments and teacher pressures. Students would be encouraged to reach out, be honest and ask for help as this is considered as a true reflection of what teaching can be like at times.

Early in their practice learning time, student teachers are encouraged to spend time developing relationships with their pupils because ‘half of teaching is that relationship’. Emphasis is placed on speaking appropriately to learners and ensuring they are comfortable with the student teacher, in order to potentially achieve the best response in their learning.
Appendix D: Mentor and student teacher reflections and artefacts

The research study that informed the case studies collected data via interviews with mentors, discussion groups with student teachers and curriculum tutors, and written or audio recorded reflections submitted by practice tutors and school co-ordinators.

To support the discussion, student teachers and mentors brought an artefact to the discussion; an object, photo, or a song title that they felt summed up their experience of effective mentoring.

The following presents these artefacts and includes some commentary about the choice of artefact representing effective mentoring.

Mentors

An example of the kindness, support and time the mentor tries to bring....

‘Having time carved out over something comforting like a cup of tea is essential to these relationships being formed well between mentee and mentor. So that they [mentees] will know that I will carve out time for them.

It’s also a good metaphor for a trainee teacher and for a mentor learning on the job like I am – that it just takes a bit of time to reach the optimum perfect spot.’

‘I brought the bar of chocolate because it’s nice, it’s a great experience being a mentor, but actually when you unwrap it, there’s like lots of little bits to it that go together to make it a holistic approach.’
Mentors

‘There are lots of different aspects to the bicycle-tool.’
Mentoring is like this – there are different ways of doing things/different approaches that can be used to support a mentor session or the discussion following a lesson.’

‘It’s a coaster […] it was a gift from my very first student teacher. At the time [there was] an inside joke about teachers having to sort of be superheroes. It’s one of those things you can never be truly prepared for and how what we do on a day to day basis is sometimes indescribable […] I can be reminded that what we do is really clever.’

‘I just feel that this symbolises when you’re mentoring somebody the starting point really of where they are. Each little bubble is part of their potential and your job as a mentor is to unlock their full potential so that you can pop up as many of the little domes as you possibly can. I feel that is one of the main roles unlocking their full potential.’

‘If I have to choose someone that represents it [mentoring], it would be Atticus Finch. He’s patient, he educates, he’s kind, he doesn’t discriminate, he’s got time for everyone no matter who or what they are. I feel like the characteristics of that character really embody what it is to be a good, solid mentor for someone.’
Mentors

“Laughter is timeless”

I always say this – not only to the students that are coming to school, but to the children as well; that it doesn’t matter how old you are or what situation you’re in – to always keep making sure that you’re having fun [...]. Focusing on the positives and just having fun while you’re doing things I think is really important.

Songs suggested by mentors that reflect effective mentoring

*Let it be* ... ‘asking for advice in the lyrics ... when I find myself in times of trouble. Being a student – you know what – it doesn’t matter if you make mistakes.’

*The future’s so bright I gotta wear shades* ... ‘it’s about identifying the next people to carry that flame on and making sure what you’ve learnt can be passed on. You also nurture their own spark because everyone brings something else.’

*A little help from my friends* ... ‘you’re not in this alone, that support network is there for you. Don’t be afraid to reach out, reaching out is not a sign of weakness. If anything it is a strength because you can tap into other people’s expertise. There are so many people within the school willing to help.’

*Don’t stop believing* ... ‘a journey song, life experiences and that belief in yourself.’

*The climb* ... ‘overcoming these struggles and adversities, talk about the importance of not giving up, continuing to try your best for yourself and the pupils.’
Student teachers

‘It’s a mug that my mentor bought me and it’s just like one of those - our teachers inspire minds little mugs. [My mentor said] although it’s like one of those cheesy mugs, it did make her think of me and that I try to inspire and that made me feel like a mentor should … like give you those kind of compliments where they are there and say those kind of things to you because we all like compliments. That’s why we give praise to the children and positive reinforcement. So I think that’s important as well for a mentor to give praise.’

‘A mentor is supposed to stretch you, and also too much can be done like this but you go back and get caught within the energy of the school, that you can be stretched but not too much.’

‘I decided to bring the book along because I think it’s very much a case of filling your mind, a plethora of knowledge, your bank of teaching, things you can kind of fall back on. And I think for me these books have really helped supplement all of the academic learning and obviously the practice learning. I bring it all together with books that show experiences that I hadn’t thought of, things outside of the box. So that kind of encompasses my holistic approach to the learning.’

‘I was a Teaching Assistant and I worked with a lot of tools with the additional needs and [others used to say that] every tiny thing that they do, however small, you’re always like thumbs up. It’s just now I’ve got it. [My mentor] is so positive. [They] have been brilliant and makes this such a positive experience. So I’ve got this [squishy thumbs up].’

“It takes a big heart to shape little minds”

The saying goes without saying. But I think a mentor is also shaping as they’ve given us information. And we have our own information. They are able to shape it into effective teaching by the end of it. They are a really big part in shaping us as student teachers through communication and collaboration. That’s how we get there in the end.
“Fighting my corner”

[A mentor is] someone who’s fighting my corner. I just thought that [they’re] the one who supports me through this journey. So if I come out of a lesson and I thought that probably wasn’t my best lesson ever. [They] would always be behind me to say.. ‘you have done this correctly…, this is what you’ve done correctly…, this is what you could do next time’. But [they’ve] ultimately always got my back in a way. The support is always for me. And if something hasn’t gone as well, [they] give me the steps to correct it.

Songs suggested by student teachers that reflect effective mentoring

**Nina cried power** … ‘this verse is descriptive of the process of being in a mentor /mentee relationship….

It’s not the wakin’, it’s the risin’
It’s the groundin’ of a foot uncompromisin’
It’s not foregoin’ of the lie, it’s not the openin’ of the eyes
It’s not the wakin’ it’s the risin’,
It’s not the shade we should be casting
It’s the light, it’s the obstacle that casts it.’

It’s the idea that they’re there to challenge you and move you forward. It’s about the growth, it’s not about they’re just there to tell you what to do they’re there to provide support and not in an uncompromising way but they’re there to challenge you. You grow with them, but you’re also meant to grow kind of beyond them.

**The climb** … ‘is one of those things that just lifts you and that’s a mentor’s job […] they lift you up and give you those extra stepping stones in order to move into your next phase or you give them extra stepping stones in order to improve their mentorship as well.’
Mentoring should be like wearing your glasses. When I don’t wear them I can see, but in the distance it’s quite blurry. When I wear my glasses it’s clear in the distance. So your mentor should help to give you a clear vision for your future in teaching.

‘This is not just any light bulb, but one that has a dimmer and disco lights.

This sums up my mentor as they kept my kind of spark and enthusiasm. They did an amazing job working with me and keeping that spark in me alive.’

I hope I can keep it alive. And just like my teaching, hopefully it will blossom into something. So I think the mentor relationship is about teaching the teacher how to start from small and then grow into something big.

‘It looks like a scaffold leaning against a book, and that’s how I kind of see it as someone who knows exactly what I’m going through, to anticipate where I’m going to go ‘Oh I’m stuck with that’. Almost like they pre-empt, but also very knowledgeable of where I’m going. So a very scaffolded approach for me.’

Further information

A free course – A mentoring mindset – is available to support anyone based in an education setting to develop understanding of effective mentoring of beginner teachers.

For more information about The Open University Partnership in Wales PGCE Programme please visit Postgraduate Certificate in Education in Wales | Open University

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