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# The professional learning continuum: mentoring in initial teacher education

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<b>Contents</b>	<b>Page</b>
<b>Introduction</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Background</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Main findings</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Recommendations</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>The impact of mentoring ITE students on the school as a learning organisation</b>	<b>9</b>
What are the benefits for the school?	9
The culture of the school	9
Strategic selection and deployment of mentors	10
<b>Effective mentoring</b>	<b>12</b>
Mentors' understanding of their role	12
Mentors' engagement with professional learning	12
Assessment practice: verbal feedback	13
Assessment practice: written feedback	14
Target-setting	15
The use of comments books	16
Providing structured learning experiences	16
Supporting students' wellbeing	17
Mentor training and development	17
Quality assurance and improving practice	18
<b>Developing the skills of career-long professional learning</b>	<b>22</b>
<b>Evidence base</b>	<b>25</b>
<b>Appendix 1: Self-evaluation questions for schools</b>	<b>26</b>
<b>Appendix 2: Principles of Mentoring and Coaching (Welsh Government, 2014)</b>	<b>28</b>
<b>Glossary</b>	<b>29</b>
<b>References</b>	<b>30</b>

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## Introduction

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This report is written in response to a request for advice from the Welsh Government in the Cabinet Secretary's annual remit letter to Estyn for 2017-2018. The report is intended for the Welsh Government, providers of initial teacher education (ITE), headteachers and staff in schools, local authorities and regional consortia. The report:

- focuses on mentoring in ITE in primary and secondary schools in Wales
- examines the role of the mentor and what makes effective practice in mentoring
- explores the relationship between professional learning in school and effective mentoring in ITE
- looks at how student teachers develop the skills and attributes of career-long professional learning, and the role that effective mentoring plays in this process
- considers the roles played by higher education institutions (HEIs) and schools in developing effective mentoring practice

The report is intended to provide a base-line study for the reform of ITE in Wales.

The report focuses on the development of student teachers' critical thinking, reflection and evaluation as vital skills for professional learning, the mentor's role in developing these skills, and how involvement in mentoring in ITE impacts on and relates to professional learning in schools more generally.

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## Background

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### Initial teacher education in Wales

There are currently three regional centres of initial teacher training in Wales. Last year, 640 primary school student teachers and 505 secondary school student teachers completed ITE programmes and achieved Qualified Teacher Status in the centres in Wales (Welsh Government, 2018). Over the period 2012-2015, Estyn inspected all three of the centres of initial teacher training. One centre was placed in Estyn monitoring, and the other two centres required re-inspection. The two centres that required re-inspection were subsequently removed from this category of follow-up.

#### Inspection findings 2012-2015

All centres have some common good features:

- Most student teachers meet the standards for QTS
- Most student teachers have a good understanding of curriculum requirements
- Student teachers have positive attitudes
- There are a few examples of very high-quality teaching in university, and very

good mentoring in schools

However, inspectors also identified the following areas for development:

- Student teachers' planning skills, especially with regard to the use of assessment information to inform planning and trainees' planning to develop pupils' skills.
- Student teachers' reflective skills, their ability to use research evidence and to evaluate their own practice.
- The quality of mentoring – training in the school-based parts of ITE programmes is too variable and depends on the skills and expertise of the school mentor. As students spend up to two-thirds of their training in school, this is a significant weakness in the system. In too many cases, students do not receive mentoring that is effective enough to help them to make good progress.
- The quality of university training – training is too variable across and within programmes. In addition, universities do not develop the research capacity of ITE departments.
- Assessment of students' progress – too many mentors are too generous in their feedback to and assessment of trainees, and do not provide targets that are focused clearly enough on trainees areas for development.
- Leadership of initial teacher training – leadership at all levels has been an area for development in all three centres inspected. There is evidence through Estyn's follow-up procedures that strategic leadership, middle leadership and self-evaluation and planning for improvement are developing across the sector.
- Quality assurance systems across the university and partnership schools are not robust enough to ensure consistency in practice or provision.
- Partnership arrangements with schools – ITE providers do not exploit well enough the partnership with schools to ensure that students have access to the best practice.

(The Annual Report of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education and Training in Wales 2014-2015, Estyn, 2016, p106)

## ITE reform

Following reviews of teacher training in Wales by Tabberer (2013) and Furlong (2015), the Welsh Government announced that all prospective providers of initial teacher education would have to submit proposals for new programmes.

From September 2019, all initial teacher education (ITE) programmes in Wales are required to be accredited by the Education Workforce Council (EWC). This function will be carried out by the EWC's ITE accreditation board. All prospective programmes need to demonstrate that they will meet the accreditation criteria in Teaching Tomorrow's Teachers (Welsh Government, 2017a).

The new accreditation procedures emphasise the unique learning and experiences that can be gained in university and in school. The most effective practice allows for a partnership between universities and their associated schools where there is a

culture of learning and sharing. In accordance with the criteria, universities will need to form a partnership with a smaller group of effective schools. The partnership will need to reconsider the planned learning experiences in school and in university in a way that brings together theory and practice in a more robust way, allowing students to analyse critically their own teaching and that of others.

### **Standards for Qualified Teacher Status**

In 2017, the Welsh Government published its new professional standards for teaching and leadership (Welsh Government, 2017b). The new standards differ from previous models that have been used by the profession. They are underpinned by a set of values and dispositions that all teachers are expected to exhibit. The standards are intended to be developmental, with a common framework covering the whole of a teacher's career from qualified teacher status (QTS), to highly effective practice including leadership.

There are five professional standards for teaching and leadership with a strong emphasis on pedagogy. They are:

- pedagogy (refining teaching; advancing learning; influencing learners);
- collaboration
- professional learning
- innovation
- leadership

Each of these standards is divided into a number of different elements, which allow the standards to be explored in greater depth, to assist with reflection and professional learning. Each element has a descriptor that exemplifies the application of each standard, including the evidence that is needed for the award of QTS. In judging student teachers' competence, Partnerships will therefore in the future have to assess students against these 32 specific evidence statements.

The new Standards will be statutory in ITE from September 2019. Key to the new Professional Standards is the intention to develop teachers' skills, knowledge and understanding for career-long professional learning.

### **Mentoring**

Mentoring in teacher education may be defined as a one to one relationship between a relatively inexperienced teacher (the mentee) and a relatively experienced one (the mentor), which aims to support the mentee's learning and development as a teacher, and their integration into the cultures of the school and the profession. Mentoring is seen as a necessarily 'developmental activity, with the emphasis on empowering and enabling [mentees] to do things for themselves' (Clutterbuck, 2004, p.11)

Hobson and Malderez (2013), however, describe the variety of roles that the mentor may play:

In the process of mentoring, a mentor may adopt a number of supportive roles or stances, including those of educator (which involves, for example, listening,

coaching and creating appropriate opportunities for the mentee's professional learning), model (inspiring, demonstrating and making visible aspects of being a teacher), acculturator (helping the mentee into full membership of the particular professional culture), sponsor ('opening doors' and introducing the mentee to the 'right people'), and provider of psychological support (providing the mentee with a safe place to release emotions or 'let off steam'). (p 2).

They also identify another part played by the mentor. That 'In addition to or instead of these roles, some mentors adopt that of judge, and engage in judgemental mentoring – which we term judgementoring'. (p 2).

Hobson and Malderez (2013) argue that the role of 'judgementor' compromises the mentoring relationship and its potential benefits. The delineation they provide emphasises the dual aspect of the mentoring role, that is, to support and challenge, and to assess.

In the Welsh Government's guidance document, 'Principles of Mentoring and Coaching' (2014), mentoring is described as '...a structured, sustained process for supporting professional learners through significant career transitions.' Coaching, by contrast, 'is a structured, sustained process for enabling the development of a specific aspect of a professional learner's practice.' Appendix 2 of this report sets out the guidance document's ten principles of effective mentoring and coaching.

### **Career-long professional learning**

The new professional standards for teaching provides the following descriptor for professional learning:

The teacher consistently extends knowledge, skills and understanding and can show how reflection and openness to challenge and support informs professional learning to progressively develop pedagogy'. (Welsh Government, 2017b, p16).

Reflection is a vital skill in career-long professional learning. The Welsh Government (2015) 'Reflective Practice' document identifies the following components of reflection:

- Reflection: involves recalling, describing and explaining what happened, as well as thinking about the consequences of what you do.
- Critical thinking: this means taking reflection to a higher level. It involves evaluating practice and making the case for change based on solid evidence. This includes being self-critical, questioning the assumptions on which personal beliefs and values have developed, and critiquing the work of others. Critical reflection is a component of reflective practice, which focuses on challenges faced within a professional context. When new insight leads to change or improvement, reflection becomes reflective practice
- Evaluation: to judge the quality or value of something. For student teachers, this means being able to judge the effectiveness of their teaching strategies, teaching skills and resources in terms of pupils' learning.

## Schools as Learning Organisations

The OECD (2016) provides the following description of the school as a 'learning organisation':

In a school as a learning organisation, staff are fully engaged in identifying the aims and priorities for their own professional learning in line with school goals and student learning needs, as defined in the school's development plan. The staff's professional learning is also based on continuous assessment and feedback that should be built into their daily practice. Such reflection, analysis and challenges to established thinking patterns are necessary to bring about and embed change and innovation in educational practice. (p 3).

The OECD (2014) identifies effective practice in helping student teachers to develop the skills and behaviours necessary for career-long professional learning, and the relationship between mentoring ITE students and the school's development as a learning organisation. There are many studies of effective practice in ITE from around the world that identify these critical thinking skills as essential to the 'thinking practitioner'. For example, the OECD describes ITE in Norway as follows:

The teacher training programmes are also research-based. They must be both implicitly and explicitly anchored in research. This entails the education programmes teaching about and engaging the students in scientific working methods, critical thinking and recognised, research-based knowledge. Research-based learning processes are to advance the students' independence, analytical skills and critical reflection so that they as teachers are able to make use of new knowledge and further develop both themselves, their profession and their place of work after completing their education. (p 73).



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## Main findings

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- 1 The most effective mentoring takes place in schools where there is an established culture of learning. In these schools, there is a strong focus on developing effective teaching. Supporting student teachers to improve their skills, knowledge and understanding is seen as part of a continuum of professional learning. These schools see themselves as 'learning schools' and that the practice of developing student teachers is part of the same process as developing practising teachers.
- 2 In the most effective schools, mentoring has a high status. Headteachers identify mentors strategically. They ensure that mentors have the leadership skills to develop others. These schools invest in their mentors and ensure that they support student teachers well. Senior mentors in these schools ensure that mentoring is undertaken effectively, and has a positive impact on students, mentors and the school. However, in many schools, even where there is an emphasis on developing and coaching teachers, mentors do not apply the skills they have learnt through whole-school professional development activities to their mentoring of student teachers.
- 3 The mentor training currently provided by the centres of ITE places too much emphasis on completion of documentation rather than developing the skills, knowledge and understanding required to mentor successfully. In addition, ITE quality assurance procedures focus too heavily on consistency and conformance at the expense of ensuring quality. As a result, ITE centres do not have robust enough processes to identify the strengths and weaknesses in mentoring, nor do they share best practice effectively enough. There is no common understanding of coaching and mentoring and too many mentors do not have good enough knowledge, understanding and skills of the most effective approaches in teacher education.
- 4 Many mentors have a good understanding of their role, as required by the ITE centre. Mentors view their role mainly in terms of supporting students to meet the standards for QTS and assessing their progress towards this goal. Very few mentors see their role as teacher educators engaged in the pedagogy of ITE, or identify specifically the approaches that they take to teaching students how to teach, including developing subject knowledge and developing pedagogy.
- 5 The few most effective mentors have a good understanding of how to build students' knowledge and experience incrementally, starting with more structured and supported learning activities and developing students' independence, reflection and criticality as they become more experienced. They build students' resilience well.
- 6 These effective mentors are often actively engaged in professional learning activities, research, or higher-level study. Although these learning opportunities are not always related directly to mentoring student teachers, these mentors are able to transfer their learning to consideration of how students develop their teaching. These mentors use their skills of reflection and critical analysis to develop student teachers. They are good role models of career-long professional learning. A few mentors who have undertaken leadership programmes transfer aspects of this training intelligently

to the context of mentoring. In particular, their learning about interpersonal skills, team-building and developing others has helped them to develop the emotional awareness to provide feedback to students that is sensitive, encouraging and stimulating.

- 7 Effective mentors provide accurate written feedback that captures students' progress fairly and holistically. They describe specific targets, and support students through a wide range of learning experiences to meet these targets. The most effective mentors teach their students using 'learning conversations', dialogue that develops students' critical and reflective skills, and helps students to analyse the practice of teaching and consider educational theory.
- 8 Currently, there are too few links between the university-based and school-based aspects of ITE programmes and too few opportunities for students to connect educational theory to teaching practice.
- 9 Very few students are able to identify the skills and behaviours that they need for career-long professional learning. Generally, students do not develop their skills of critical analysis, reflection and evaluation well enough over the duration of their programmes. They do not engage well enough with research and professional dialogue with their tutors and mentors to make the crucial links between theory and practice.
- 10 A majority of students benefit from undertaking research projects that require them to reflect on teaching and learning and to connect this valuably to educational research. These projects also help mentors to develop their knowledge and understanding of theory in relation to practice. However, many students do not find that the assignments that they are required to write help them to develop their teaching skills.
- 11 In the main, students do not reflect critically enough in the written evaluations of their teaching and progress against their targets. They do not present evidence of deeper thinking, such as making connections between other learning experiences, or draw upon research and wider reading.

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## Recommendations

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### **ITE partnership schools should:**

- R1 Link their work in ITE more strongly to the development of practice and provision in school, and especially to that of professional learning
- R2 Work closely with their university partners to ensure that mentors have the skills, knowledge and understanding necessary for teacher educators
- R3 Develop robust plans to improve the research skills of school staff, making the most of their partnership with their university partner
- R4 Ensure that senior mentors play a strategic role in developing mentors and in evaluating the effectiveness of ITE partnership working
- R5 Work alongside university partners to design and implement ITE programmes that ensure a successful blend of theory and practice.

### **Universities should:**

- R6 Work closely with schools to support the development of research skills and strategies
- R7 Improve mentor training and development to focus more on the skills of teacher education
- R8 Work with schools to develop more robust processes to evaluate the quality of mentoring
- R9 Work alongside university partners to design programmes that ensure a successful blend of theory and practice
- R10 Strengthen student teachers' skills of reflection, evaluation and critical analysis
- R11 In collaboration with their partner schools, consider the most effective ways to assess students that takes good account of their development towards QTS

### **Welsh Government should:**

- R12 Work with ITE providers to support a national approach to mentor development in ITE

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## The impact of mentoring ITE students on the school as a learning organisation

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### What are the benefits for the school?

- 12 Most headteachers in ITE partnership schools show a strong commitment to developing student teachers. They use terms such as ‘moral purpose’ and ‘professional duty’ to describe the reasons for their involvement in ITE. One of the main reasons cited for their partnership with ITE providers is to help with recruitment, especially of teachers in shortage subjects such as mathematics. Headteachers describe other benefits of participation in the training of student teachers. Most commonly, headteachers refer to the new ideas that students bring and up-to-date skills, particularly their digital skills.
- 13 Many headteachers also found that mentoring ITE students provided useful professional learning opportunities for teachers. However, very few schools view their involvement in ITE strategically. Although they recognise that participating in ITE is complementary to their whole-school aims to develop practice and provision, very few schools identify specifically how their involvement in ITE has an impact on improving the skills of teachers or leaders. Only a very few schools include the processes to support ITE students, or the benefits of their partnership with ITE providers in their development planning.
- 14 A very few headteachers identify how their partnership with the university benefits the school in terms of access to research and opportunities for accredited professional learning activities. A few schools that are developing new approaches to ITE with their university partners note that the requirements of these initiatives have enhanced teachers’ understanding of educational research, for example through mentors supporting students with their research projects. However, these strategies are at an early stage of development, and there has been limited evaluation of this work on both the standards achieved by students and the impact on school staff.
- 15 Most schools do not have a robust plan to improve the research skills of their staff, including how they might capitalise on the opportunities for professional learning that partnership with a university might bring.

### The culture of the school

- 16 The culture of the school is an important factor in the effective development of student teachers. Effective mentoring takes place in schools where there is a strong professional learning culture, where developing teaching across the school is a priority and all teachers are engaged in this collaborative learning. These schools see themselves as ‘learning schools’ and that the practice of developing student teachers is part of the same process as developing practising teachers. These schools measure the impact of their involvement in ITE in terms of both the skills, knowledge and understanding that teachers develop to improve the practice of their peers, and how improvements in teachers’ practice supports pupils’ progress.

- 17 However, although many schools describe themselves as 'learning organisations', and that developing ITE students is part of a continuum of professional learning, only a very few schools make good enough links between the work they do to develop teaching staff and mentoring student teachers. Even in many schools that have invested in training in mentoring and coaching, or where there are established systems for peer observation, leaders have not considered the relationship between this work and mentoring ITE students. There is often an assumption that mentors will simply transfer these skills to supporting student teachers. However, much of this professional learning does not take good enough account of the how to develop teachers at different stages of their career.

In **Treorchy Comprehensive School**, coaching is used throughout the school, by leaders, staff and pupils as a whole-school approach to improvement. Individuals are encouraged to reflect on their learning, consider any barriers to progress and identify the necessary steps to move forward. Coaching has become part of the culture of the school. Teachers are becoming adept at asking questions that promote resilience and independence, and mentors have adapted the same approach to developing their student teachers. Mentors in Treorchy provide students with professional challenges that are often uncomfortable and support them to succeed. These mentors know their students well and respond to the developing needs of students as they become more experienced.

- 18 A few schools that are exploring using the new Professional Teaching Standards are beginning to consider how these standards may be used to recognise the work that mentors do to support student teachers as part of their professional learning. In a very few schools, mentors have professional learning targets linked to their mentoring. This practice emphasises the importance of the mentoring role, and provides a means by which schools can monitor the impact of supporting ITE students on their staff and school.

### Strategic selection and deployment of mentors

- 19 Effective mentoring most consistently occurs in schools where mentors and senior mentors are chosen strategically. They have a high status in the school because of the role that they play in professional learning.
- 20 There is no common approach to the selection of mentors in ITE partner schools. In many instances, mentors are self-selecting. A minority of mentors noted that they saw the mentoring role as an opportunity to take on greater responsibility. However, overall, in too many schools, the role of the mentor is not planned for sufficiently well, either as a coherent learning pathway, or as part of a whole-school professional learning strategy.
- 21 In the most effective schools, headteachers and senior mentors ensure that students are not placed in classes or departments where there is weak practice or outcomes, or where staff require development or time to create stability, for example where there is a new head of department.

- 22 A few headteachers identify mentors more strategically. They regard supporting mentors as beneficial to the development of leadership and management skills through the school. In a very few schools, headteachers ensure that mentors have undertaken middle leadership training so that they develop the interpersonal skills and behaviour to manage others, including delivering effective feedback and managing challenging relationships.

In **Eirias School**, the mentor role is seen as a privileged position, which offers rewarding professional development for staff in preparation for middle leadership, or for those who simply wish to take on greater responsibilities at a key point in their professional development. The school has identified career development pathways for staff. This includes a mentoring pathway to support the development of relevant skills, and ensure the ongoing professional development required for mentors, or for those who see this as a future development pathway.

- 23 As part of their strategy to improve teaching, a very few primary schools require all teachers to be mentors. Where this approach results in successful mentoring, headteachers ensure that all mentors work in a consistent manner that is aligned to developing teaching across the school.
- 24 Most senior mentors are members of the senior leadership team in the school. Their role description usually covers professional learning across the school, including developing teaching and support for newly qualified teachers (NQTs). This allows the senior mentor a valuable oversight of how professional learning activities in the school link to the mentoring of students and the school's involvement in ITE. However in many cases, the senior mentors regard their role more operationally, and do not link their responsibilities coherently enough so that involvement in ITE has the most beneficial impact on the school.
- 25 Most senior mentors see their role as coordinating mentoring across the school. A majority of senior mentors take responsibility for student wellbeing and their students find this aspect of the role beneficial to their progress. Most senior mentors regard their responsibility as providing an 'external' view on students' progress, and a minority of senior mentors see their role as having increasing responsibility for quality assuring the work of mentors. However, this quality assurance aspect is more about providing consistency with partnership processes, rather than focusing on the quality of mentoring.

In **Ysgol Bro Myrddin**, the senior mentor (the assistant headteacher at the school) chooses which members of staff will be trained as mentors very carefully. She gives appropriate consideration to how much experience members of staff have and discusses the effectiveness of their teaching over time with their line managers. Once members of staff have been identified as possible mentors, the senior mentor observes them teaching and conducts a formal discussion asking them to evaluate their own lesson. The focus of this meeting is on how the teacher could improve his/her teaching by adopting a wider range of pedagogy.



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## Effective mentoring

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### Mentors' understanding of their role

- 26 All ITE providers outline clearly the role and responsibilities of mentors. These include meeting regularly with students to discuss their progress, supporting students' planning, teaching and assessment, helping students to gain an understanding of whole school issues, monitoring students' files, helping students to reflect critically on their practice, and assessing students against the standards for QTS. All ITE centres emphasise the importance of a trusting and open relationship between mentor and student, and that supporting students' wellbeing is an important aspect of the role. Most mentors have a good understanding of their role and responsibilities as defined by the ITE provider.
- 27 However, students report that there is great variation in the amount of time and quality of support provided to them by their mentors. A few students have experienced poor mentoring over the duration of their programme. They describe mentors who seemed to have little time for them, were inexperienced or untrained and who generally did not provide the guidance that they expected.
- 28 In the schools identified by ITE providers as having good practice in mentoring, most mentors approach their role seriously. They see themselves as making an important contribution to the profession.
- 29 Many mentors describe their role as falling into two areas. Firstly of supporting students by being a 'critical friend', allowing students to make mistakes and being there to provide advice and guidance to improve their teaching. They recognise that students often require pastoral support to cope with the emotional demands of teaching and talk about the importance of being approachable and diplomatic. Secondly, they see their role as assessors (what Hobson and Malderez (2013) describe as 'judgementoring'), knowing the standards for QTS and assessing students' accurately. A few mentors identify some of the key skills of mentoring, such as skilful questioning and listening. Very few mentors see their role as teacher educators engaged in the pedagogy of ITE, or identify specifically the approaches that they take to teaching students how to teach, including developing subject knowledge and developing pedagogy.

### Mentors' engagement with professional learning

- 30 Effective mentors have particular characteristics. They are often engaged in professional learning. They have an understanding of classroom-based research and engage with and in research. They are involved in whole-school developments. They have personal qualities that enable them to develop student teachers.
- 31 Effective mentors use their skills of reflection and critical analysis to develop student teachers, and to promote career-long professional learning. They also know how to use the QTS standards to encourage a holistic and personal approach to becoming a teacher, understand progression in ITE, and enable student teachers to be the best they can be.

- 32 These mentors are able to encourage and develop in their students the same skills of analysis and reflection (a 'critical learning partnership'). This helps student teachers to begin their path to career-long professional learning.
- 33 Effective mentoring requires complex skills. Cain (2009, p 2) describes mentoring an activity based on a 'unique relationship involving an extremely complex interplay of cognitive, affective and interpersonal factors'. Even those mentors who display a natural disposition for supporting student teachers, or those who are experienced mentors, have enhanced their skills through further training and development.
- 34 The few most skilful mentors are engaged in professional learning, although this is not always directly linked to mentoring student teachers. Mentors who undertake research into classroom practice build a useful knowledge base for supporting ITE students. These mentors take an enquiring and analytical approach to discovering the most effective teaching strategies, and encourage the same in their student teachers. Their understanding of research methods also helps students to carry out their own small-scale research assignments more successfully.
- 35 The most effective mentoring takes place in schools that have a strong focus on the professional learning of all staff, particularly where there is a clear strategy for developing teaching. Mentors in these schools are enthusiastic to improve their own teaching and support their colleagues to do the same. In-house and external opportunities for professional learning help these mentors both to reflect on their own practice and heightens their awareness of how to develop as a teacher. These mentors use their skills of reflection and critical analysis to develop student teachers. They are good role models who promote career-long professional learning.
- 36 Mentors who have participated in professional learning in mentoring and coaching speak with a greater understanding of the skills, approaches and techniques required to mentor successfully. In a few cases, mentors adapt what they have learnt about coaching and mentoring experienced teachers to the context of supporting novice teachers skilfully. For example, by phrasing questions more pertinently, or by finding ways to extend the progress of highly competent students.
- 37 However, there is no common understanding of mentoring and coaching, and this can lead to misconceptions in developing the practice of beginning teachers. For example, using coaching models that expect students to draw upon knowledge and experiences that they do not have.
- 38 A few mentors who have undertaken leadership programmes transfer aspects of this training intelligently to the context of mentoring. In particular, their learning about interpersonal skills, team-building and developing others have helped them to develop the emotional awareness to provide feedback to students that is sensitive, encouraging and stimulating.

#### **Assessment practice: verbal feedback**

- 39 Most mentors meet regularly with their students to discuss their progress. They provide verbal and written feedback on lessons they have observed and discuss progress and ways forward for students to meet the standards for QTS.



- 40 Effective mentors use an incremental approach to developing their student teachers. They put into practice the idea of a continuum of support that begins with structured guidance and opportunities to try out teaching approaches, by using strategies such as team teaching. When a student becomes more proficient, they guide in more of a 'coaching' capacity, allowing students to test out and evaluate approaches for themselves. This allows students to become more independent.
- 41 Many mentors provide ongoing verbal feedback to students throughout their school experiences. Most mentors meet with their students at least once per week to discuss students' progress formally, and to complete assessment and monitoring forms in accordance with centre requirements. Many students value these opportunities, and find that mentors' feedback helps them to understand the standards for QTS, develop their confidence and improve their organisational skills.
- 42 The most effective mentors teach their students using 'learning conversations'. This is not simply feedback, but a constructive dialogue that enables students to develop their skills, knowledge and understanding. Nearly all mentors recognise this as effective practice, but too many mentors provide advice that is prescriptive, based on their own practice and solutions, and rarely makes reference to educational theory, even with more proficient students and those approaching the end of their programme. In this way, they do not develop students' reflective and critical skills well enough.
- 43 In the best examples of verbal feedback, mentors demonstrate strong listening skills. They allow the student to lead the evaluation of the lesson and use effective questioning and challenge to promote critical reflection. They provide a model of effective evaluation. They discuss potential solutions to address the student's areas for development that foster professional learning.

Mentors in **Treorchy Comprehensive School** use video technology to record the student's lesson. The student's lesson is recorded, and the student is asked to review the lesson and identify important areas for discussion (including strong and weaker features). The mentor does the same. The mentor and student then use the video during the lesson feedback to discuss areas of strength and development. The mentor provides a model of critical questioning, and the student is given valuable practice in structured reflection.

#### Assessment practice: written feedback

- 44 Nearly all mentors provide students with written feedback following formal lesson observations. In many cases these formal records are detailed, mostly evaluative and make appropriate reference to the standards for QTS. All centres of ITE provide helpful guidance to enable mentors, tutors and students to judge progress against the standards. This guidance has resulted in greater consistency of practice in mentor assessment of students' progress and attainment on school experience. However, the guidance provided discourages mentors from using the full range of grades, and in practice, the awarding of judgement grades is too mechanistic. The guidance encourages a depression of grades towards the beginning of students'

school experience. In all centres, the descriptor for the highest grade is also unrealistically ambitious and difficult to interpret. However, more importantly, in many cases, the assessment of students' attainment and progress is too atomistic, and does not allow for a more sophisticated assessment of students' progress in the round and over time.

- 45 In the main, students place a high value on the written feedback provided by mentors, although they find that verbal feedback is more useful in contextualising and supporting their progress. Many students understand well the process by which they are judged. They find the guidance for judging their progress helpful in tracking their progress. However, a minority of students felt that there was too much variation in mentors' interpretation of the judgement descriptors. They felt that the targets set for them did not necessarily help them to move towards improving their grade.
- 46 Where students have written feedback from their university tutors, students found this to be extremely beneficial, especially in making the links between university studies and school experience.

### Target-setting

- 47 Nearly all mentors set targets for students as part of their written feedback on students' progress. In a most cases, these targets relate well to the standards for QTS, and many refer specifically to the most important areas for development drawn from students' teaching. Nearly all mentors suggest strategies for improvement.
- 48 In the early evaluations of students' progress, many mentors are adept at identifying the key issues for students' to address. At this early stage of development, the suggested ways to meet these targets are suitably specific. However, towards the end of students' school experiences, a minority of targets set do not relate well enough to criticisms noted in the assessment of teaching. A minority of targets are not specific enough, and do not identify particular skills, knowledge and understanding, for example, 'be more confident', or 'use more imaginative teaching strategies'. In a majority of cases, the suggested strategies for improvement are either too broad and are written as further targets, for example 'develop your questioning skills', or they are too narrow and identify one solution to a problem, for example to group pupils in a particular way, or to use mini-whiteboards.
- 49 Although, in many instances, students see the target-setting process as forming part of a wider conversation about their progress, overall the targets and suggested strategies do not form part of a coherent learning process where students are encouraged to reflect on their practice and discover solutions for themselves.
- 50 In the best examples, mentors recognise the advice and guidance that students need at different stages of their development. They direct students towards further learning, such as theoretical texts or learning from other teachers. They encourage students to share what they have learnt, so that mentor and student are able to have an informed conversation about the best ways forward.

### The use of comments books

- 51 All ITE providers encourage the practice of using a formative comments book for mentors to provide ongoing feedback to students. This means that all teachers and support staff who work with the students can provide informal, immediate feedback. Many students find this helpful and supportive. In best cases, mentors use information from the comments book to provide a more rounded view of students' progress. However, comments are sometimes too superficial to provide constructive feedback. Many students find these comments useful for their evaluation of lessons, although, in a minority of cases, students do not reflect on these comments well enough and rely too heavily on the feedback in the comments book. This results in evaluations that are descriptive rather than analytical.

### Providing structured learning experiences

- 52 The most effective mentors draw skilfully on their conversations and on formal and informal feedback to students to plan learning experiences that help students meet their targets and improve. For example, mentors arrange for students to observe other teachers in the school to address specific shortcomings in the students' teaching, such as questioning techniques or behaviour management. In the best examples, mentors help students to structure these learning experiences, so that students focus precisely on the skills that will help them to improve. For example, they help the student to pose questions for their observation, so that they are able to analyse critically the teaching of others so that they can develop successful strategies that suit their own developing teaching style. These mentors know their students well and identify the most effective learning experiences for the students' phase of development.
- 53 A few effective mentors help students to deconstruct teaching approaches by modelling teaching in their own classes for students to observe. These experiences provide an opportunity for students to discuss what works well in particular contexts, and to explore aspects of pedagogy. These effective mentors are confident in their own practice and are also open and willing to discuss where teaching is less effective, and what they would do to improve. These mentors provide good role models for reflection and evaluation.
- 54 In a few schools, mentors ensure that students are involved in aspects of the school's professional learning programme. A minority of students have benefited valuably from joining professional learning groups, In-service training (INSET), and twilight sessions that relate specifically to skills that they are aiming to develop.
- 55 Schools are required by the ITE centres to provide a programme of professional development sessions for student teachers. In the main, these programmes provide useful opportunities for students to learn about whole-school issues, such as the approach to data collection, or strategies for pupils with additional learning needs (ALN). The programme also gives students an awareness of the roles of various practitioners and senior leaders in the school. However, these sessions generally are not designed carefully enough to allow students to blend the theory and practice of teaching. In addition, in many cases, school-based programmes do not correspond well enough to the university-based programme. This means that students do not have enough opportunities to build their understanding in the most coherent way.

- 56 Generally, mentors have a limited awareness of the university-based course. In particular, their knowledge of how the programme, and their contribution to this, develops student teachers' critical reflection skills is limited. Too many mentors do not recognise that their role is to help student teachers to make connections between theoretical aspects of their learning and their classroom practice.

### Supporting students' wellbeing

- 57 In many cases, students build strong professional relationships with their mentors. This allows students to ask questions and seek guidance from their mentors to support their development effectively. In particular, students value the way that this relationship supports their wellbeing. Effective mentors have strong interpersonal skills and are able to provide fair and critical assessments in a sensitive and clear way. They recognise that judicious praise is important and that students require a substantial amount of support to deal with the stresses and challenges of their programme and the vulnerability they experience as a novice teacher. A minority of mentors provide structured advice to students to support their work-life balance, such as guidance about lesson planning and the importance of rest and recuperation during school experience. Effective mentors draw upon their own experiences as students to support students.
- 58 An important feature in a new teacher's development is the feeling of 'fitting into the school'. Effective senior mentors and mentors make sure that students are welcomed into the school community. They explain clearly the professional requirements of the school and also engage students in whole-school life, such as involving students in extra-curricular activities, or inviting students to staff meetings and parents' evenings. They help students to build good working relationships with other adults in the school, for example, by helping students to plan alongside teaching assistants.
- 59 One aspect of enabling the student to feel more comfortable in their school experience is to help students to feel as though they can take risks in their teaching in a safe and supportive environment. Effective mentors allow students to test ideas and assist students in taking a research-based approach by helping students to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses in their experimental approaches.

### Mentor training and development

- 60 Currently, the mentor training and development provided by the centres of ITE does not address specifically the skills, knowledge and understanding needed to mentor successfully. There is no shared definition of mentoring within ITE providers and across Wales, and this means that practice and understanding of the mentoring process varies too much.
- 61 All providers of ITE are considering new approaches to mentor development to meet the demands of the newly accredited courses. Recently, ITE providers have produced useful guidance for mentors ensure greater consistency of practice in mentor assessment of student's progress and attainment on school experience. These include assessment guidance for mentors to help mentors, tutors and students to track and assess progress against the standards for QTS and enhanced quality assurance procedures.

- 62 However, most mentor training and development activity places too much emphasis on the completion of documentation, and does not focus well enough on developing mentors as teacher educators. In addition, quality assurance procedures in the school-based elements of the programmes emphasise conformance to assessment procedures and the alignment of judgements, at the expense of improving the quality of mentoring practice overall.
- 63 Training and development for senior mentors does not emphasise well enough the role of the senior mentor to lead ITE in their school, or to consider how mentoring links to aspects of whole school professional learning strategies in leadership or teaching.

### Quality assurance and improving practice

- 64 All ITE centres have processes to quality assure assessment of students' school experiences and to review mentors' practice. These include moderation by university tutors across partnership schools, analysis of mentors' written feedback and the use of findings from student surveys. However, these processes focus too heavily on aspects of consistency and conformance at the expense of evaluating and improving the quality of mentoring.
- 65 Joint observations between university tutors and school mentors, and senior mentors and mentors, is common practice across ITE providers. This process provides useful opportunities to discuss the judgements awarded to students and to arrive at fair assessment. In a few instances, new mentors speak positively of how the university tutors model effective feedback to students and then return to school to monitor the mentor's practice. However, overall, joint observations are not used sufficiently well as a platform to discuss mentoring practice. ITE providers do not identify or share good practice in mentoring well enough.
- 66 Those partnership schools that are involved in moderation activities, where mentors meet together to discuss their students' outcomes along with evidence of progress find this activity beneficial in ensuring consistency in assessment. Students value the

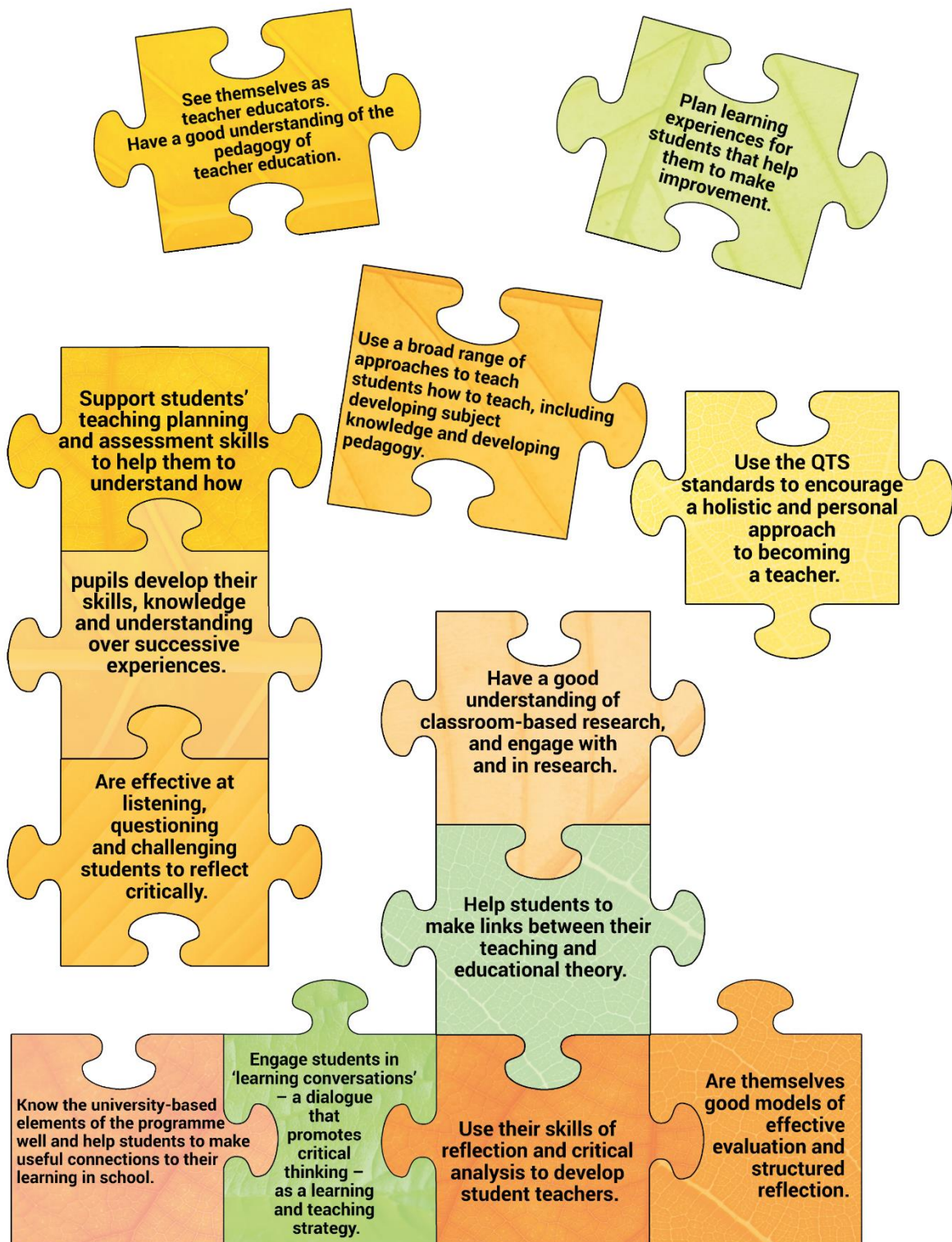
In **Ysgol Gymraeg Caerffili**, mentors meet fortnightly, regardless of whether they have a student or not, to quality assure each other's work. They talk about lesson observations and scrutinise formal feedback forms. This is an important outlet for mentors to discuss any uncertainties that may arise. The school does not assume that all mentors are all-knowing and therefore do not require further training. Mentors at the school value the support and opportunities to discuss problems and get advice. By interacting with other mentors, they often discover solutions to each other's challenges.

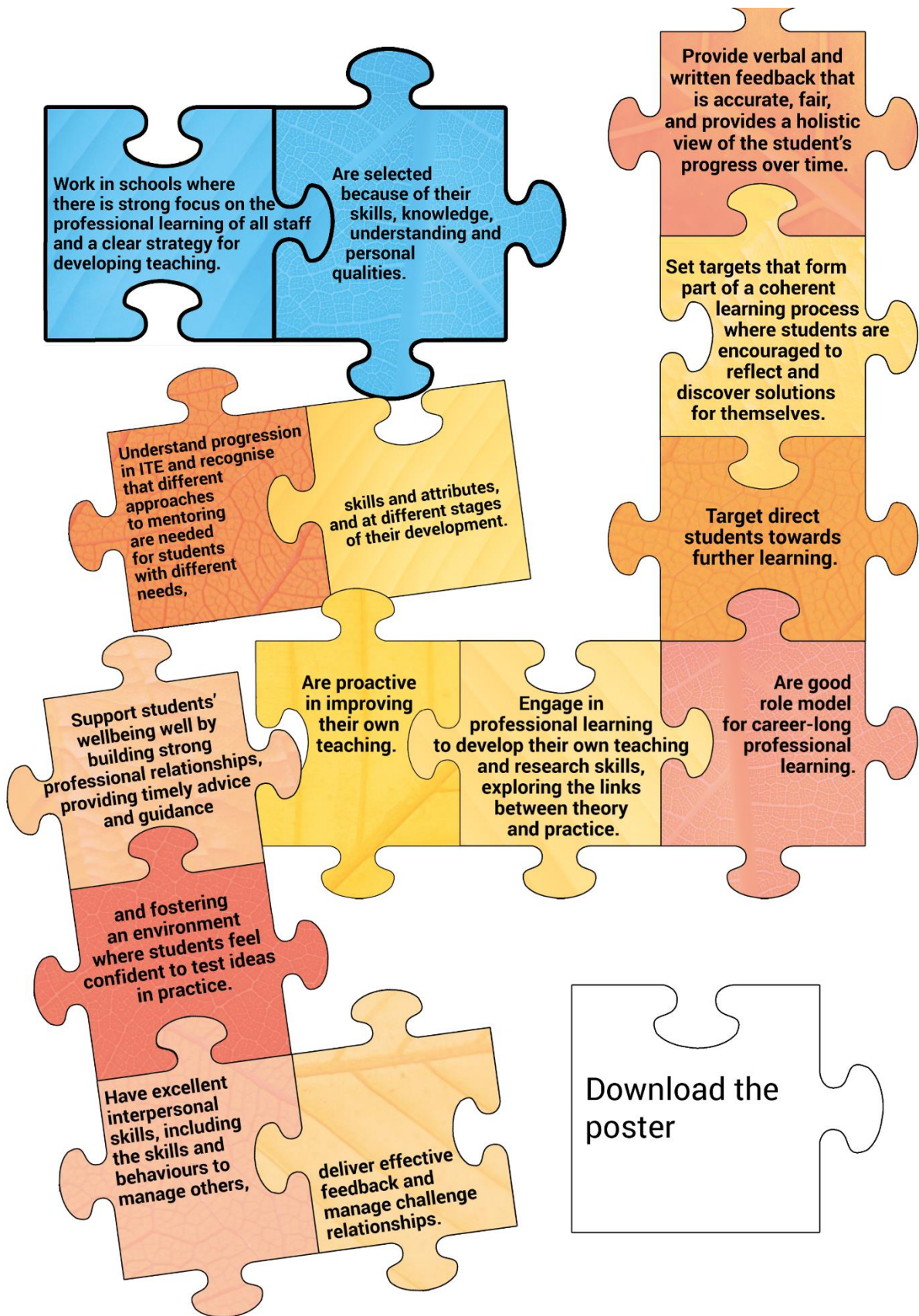
feedback that mentors provide following this activity and consider that this brings a good level of objectivity to their assessment. However, this is also an arena where opportunities to discuss mentoring practice, and strategies to improve student outcomes is underdeveloped.

- 67 In many schools where mentoring is more effective, senior mentors meet regularly with their mentees. A few senior mentors use this opportunity to give mentees feedback on their practice and to discuss practical approaches to developing students' teaching. Only a very few mentees and senior mentors consider well enough the effectiveness of mentoring. Furthermore, in too many partnership schools, mentees and senior mentors do not receive feedback on their practice from school leaders or from their partner university.



## The most effective mentors...







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## Developing the skills of career-long professional learning

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- 68 To develop the skills, attitudes and behaviours required for career-long professional learning, students need to hone the skills of reflection, critical thinking, and evaluation. They need to engage with research, professional dialogue with their mentors and tutors to make the crucial links between theory and practice that will enable them to continue to develop their skills into their teaching career. In addition, they need to build their resilience to cope with stressful situations and to deal with setbacks. ITE centres and their partnership schools do not ensure well enough that students have dedicated time and structured learning experiences in school to consider the links between theory and practice. ITE centres are beginning to build such experiences into programmes, but this work is at a very early stage of development.
- 69 Many students regard the school-based and university-based elements of their programmes as distinct and discrete. They see their school experiences as the most important part of their programme in that it is in school that they learn how to teach. They understand the importance of relating theory to practice, but felt that they were not supported adequately to make these links, either in school or in university.
- 70 Very few students can identify the skills that they need for career-long professional learning. A majority of students recognise that reflection on their practice is important to their continuing development as teachers.
- 71 All ITE providers help students to organise their reflections on their teaching through structured frameworks for written evaluation. These help students to consider aspects of their teaching and pupils' learning, and to propose their own targets for improvement. However, in the main, in their written evaluations of their teaching and progress against their targets, students do not reflect critically enough. They do not present evidence of deeper thinking, such as making connections between other learning experiences, or drawing upon research and wider reading. Generally, students do not make enough progress in these skills over the duration of their programme. Very few mentors discussed students' written evaluations, or provided feedback to help students to improve this aspect of their work. In addition, many students considered their written evaluations as a task to complete, rather than developing important skills in becoming a teacher.
- 72 Only a few students make effective links between their lesson evaluations and their lesson planning. A majority of students do not focus well enough on ensuring that their planned learning objectives for pupils describe learning specifically enough, and in turn, this means that their lesson evaluations do not analyse well enough how successful their planned teaching strategies were in helping pupils to make progress in their learning.
- 73 In the best examples, mentoring provides opportunities to develop students' critical and reflective skills and attitudes through learning conversations that link theory to developing practice. They help students to build the skills they need for effective

planning and evaluation through reference to pedagogical research and how this relates to experience and context. These mentors talk through the design of lesson plans with their students, and following lessons, use the plans to help students to evaluate specifically where and why learning was not effective. They help students to see how lesson planning fits into the 'big picture' of pupils' learning experiences, for example by showing how the development of pupils' oracy skills relates to their writing, or how learning is built over successive years.

- 74 Generally, mentor support for students' planning is too variable. Although mentors generally check students' planning before they teach a lesson, this is mostly to ensure compliance with schemes of work, or that planning is broadly appropriate.
- 75 The most effective mentors recognise that less experienced students often have insufficient knowledge of specific skills such as behaviour management, questioning or differentiation to reflect on their progress with a high degree of criticality. These mentors are adept at directing students towards the information and knowledge suitable for the students' stage of development.
- 76 Many students do not make good enough connections between the assignments that they are required to write and the development of their teaching skills. A majority of students found writing assignments onerous, and not related helpfully enough to develop their skills, knowledge and understanding of teaching. A few students felt that their assignments could be timed more usefully to be related to their development as teachers, so that they could achieve a more informed view of important aspects of their practice such as assessment earlier in their programme.
- 77 A minority of students benefit from action-research projects that require them to gather evidence from their school experience and relate this to reading about educational theory. In the most effective instances, students worked with their mentors on such projects. Mentors reported that this work provided valuable opportunities to explore aspects of pedagogy that were also beneficial to their own practice and to school improvement generally.
- 78 Many students state that they have benefited from the work that ITE providers have undertaken to improve student wellbeing. This includes specific sessions in university and in school that help students to develop an appropriate work-life balance and the valuable support that was offered to them by mentors and university tutors to deal with stressful situations. A few students have found that the interventions provided by the ITE centre to resolve difficult relationships with schools to be extremely valuable in helping them to continue successfully on their programme. However, only a very few students identified resilience as key to their continuous development. A very few students expressed doubts about their ability to deal with what they perceived to be the sustained pressures of teaching.
- 79 In many schools, mentors and leaders have limited knowledge and understanding of the ways in which the university develops student teachers' critical thinking and reflection skills. As a result, they do not make links to this learning to support the student teacher to develop this aspect of her professional practice.

- 80 Schools where mentoring is effective also involve their students fully in the professional learning activities that take place in the school. This provides students with a model of good practice in career-long professional learning, and a realistic picture of what good schools do.

In **Bryn Deva Primary School**, student teachers gain a strong knowledge of the variety of approaches to professional learning that school staff engage with. Valuable first-hand experiences include: attending whole-school staff development, involvement in a whole-school curriculum initiative as a Pioneer School, an external training course, a cluster moderation event, in-house 'drop in' support sessions led by teachers, peer observation of teaching and collaborative planning (with her mentor and consortium literacy adviser). As a result, students develop a positive attitude to lifelong learning. They recognise that engaging in learning at every stage of their career is essential for personal and professional growth. Students record and reflect on professional experiences to identify next steps for development.

By integrating and addressing the students' development needs within the wider whole-school strategy for professional learning, leaders have helped student teachers to understand the importance of professional learning to enrich, develop and enhance professional practice. Students understand well how collaborative approaches benefit practitioners. This is a strong aspect of the school's mentoring practice.

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## Evidence base

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The findings and recommendations in this report draw on visits to 20 schools, and to the three centres of ITE in Wales.

The schools selected for visits were identified by the centres of ITE as examples of good mentoring practice. The sample includes primary and secondary schools, and English and Welsh medium schools.

When visiting these schools, inspectors:

- held discussions with members of the leadership team
- interviewed the senior mentor and mentors in the school
- observed the mentor feeding back to their student following an observed lesson
- met with students to discuss their views on their ITE programme
- scrutinised the students' files
- reviewed the paperwork completed by mentors and senior mentors

List of schools visited:

Alun School  
Cadoxton Primary School  
Coed Eva Primary School  
Coedcae Comprehensive School  
Craig Yr Hesg Primary School  
Crickhowell High School  
Eirias High School  
Mary Immaculate Roman Catholic High School  
Palmerston Primary School  
Pentrehafod School  
Pontarddulais Primary School  
St Joseph's Roman Catholic High School  
Sychdyn County Primary School  
Treorchy Comprehensive School  
Ysgol Bro Myrddin  
Ysgol Bryn Deva  
Ysgol Gymraeg Caerffili  
Ysgol Uwchradd Aberteifi  
Ysgol Y Dderwen  
Ystrad Mynach Primary School

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## Appendix 1

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### Self-evaluation questions for schools

- What is our vision for developing student teachers?
- How do we show our commitment to developing student teachers?
- How do we evaluate the impact of our involvement in ITE?
- How does our involvement with ITE contribute to our culture of professional learning and the development of our own staff?
- Do we make strong links between our work to develop teaching and the development of student teachers?
- How can we make the most of our partnership with the university to support the professional learning of our teachers?
- How well do we work with our university partner to make sure that all staff involved in supporting student teachers have the necessary skills, knowledge and understanding to do so?
- Have all mentors had the necessary training in the interpersonal skills that they need to manage others, deliver effective feedback and manage challenging relationships?
- Do we have a robust plan to develop the research skills of our staff?
- How do we judge the effectiveness of our mentors? Our senior mentors?
- Do we have an overall view of the quality of mentoring in the school? How well do we work with our university partners to share this information?
- How do we share examples of best practice in mentoring – in school? Across the partnership?
- How well do we support mentors and senior mentors in need of development?
- How can we use the Professional Teaching Standards to support our mentors to develop their skills, knowledge and understanding?
- How do we ensure that our pupils make good progress? What measures do we have in place to ensure that pupils' learning is not disrupted?
- How well do we make connections between the school-based and university-based programme?
- What are the benefits to linking with other schools in the partnership to our staff and pupils?

### Self-evaluation questions for universities

- Do we have a clear strategy to develop the role of mentors and senior mentors that contributes effectively to our vision of teacher education?
- How well do we ensure that mentors have the necessary skills, knowledge and understanding to be effective teacher educators?
- How well do we work with our partner schools to support the development of research skills and strategies?
- How well do we work with our schools to evaluate the quality of mentoring?
- How well do we ensure that information and evidence from the evaluation of mentoring feeds into our improvement planning?

- How well do we support senior mentors so that they contribute to the development of effective mentoring?
- Do we have effective strategies to share good practice in mentoring and senior mentoring?
- How effective are our strategies to support individual mentors in need of development?
- How well do we work with our schools to design programmes that ensure a successful blend of theory and practice?
- How well do we develop students' skills of reflection and critical analysis? How do we judge students' progress in this area?
- Do we plan and design assignments that help students to interrogate educational research to develop their teaching in the most effective way?
- How effective is the assessment of students' progress to a) ensure that students develop their teaching in a holistic and personal way and b) provide the information that we need to judge the quality of provision?

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## Appendix 2

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### Principles of Mentoring and Coaching (Welsh Government, 2014)

The document outlines ten principles of effective mentoring and coaching:

Effective mentoring and coaching involves:

- a learning conversation structured professional dialogue, rooted in evidence from the professional learner's practice, which articulates existing beliefs and practices to enable reflection on them
- a thoughtful relationship developing trust, attending respectfully and with sensitivity to the powerful emotions involved in deep professional learning
- a learning agreement establishing confidence about the boundaries of the relationship by agreeing and upholding ground rules that address imbalances in power and accountability
- combining support from fellow professional learners and specialists collaborating with colleagues to sustain commitment to learning and relate specialist inputs to everyday practice; seeking out specialist expertise to extend skills and knowledge and to model good practice
- growing self direction an evolving process in which the learner takes increasing control over their professional development as skills, knowledge and self awareness increase
- setting challenging and personal goals identifying goals rooted in aspirations for pupils that build on what they know and can do already whilst attending to school and individual priorities
- understanding why different approaches work developing understanding of the rationale for new approaches so practice and theory can be developed side by side and adapted for different contexts
- acknowledging the benefits to the mentors and coaches acknowledging the professional learning that mentors and coaches gain from the opportunity to mentor or coach and using them to model professional learning
- experimenting and observing creating a learning environment that supports risk-taking and innovation and encourages professional learners to seek out and analyse direct evidence from practice
- using resources effectively making and using time and other resources creatively to protect and sustain learning, action and reflection on a day to day basis

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## Glossary

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<b>Mentor</b>	School-based class or subject teacher with responsibility for student teachers
<b>Partnership schools</b>	Schools that have entered into a formal partnership agreement with an ITE provider to provide learning experiences for student teachers
<b>Senior mentor</b>	School-based mentor with overall responsibility for mentoring in the school
<b>Tutor</b>	University-based lecturer with responsibility for student teachers

### Numbers – quantities and proportions

nearly all =	with very few exceptions
most =	90% or more
many =	70% or more
a majority =	over 60%
half =	50%
around half =	close to 50%
a minority =	below 40%
few =	below 20%
very few =	less than 10%



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