ESCalate Themed funding: Student Well-being Grant Project Final Report

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Trainee teachers' physical and mental wellbeing: a study of university and school experience provision

Final Report

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We would like to thank our research assistant, Emily Hillier, who worked tirelessly with students and staff at all three partner universities.

We would also like to thank all of the staff and students who gave us their time and the benefit of their experiences.

1A TOP LINE SUMMARY

This study investigated the issue of trainee teachers' physical and mental wellbeing in three universities: one English, one Welsh and one Scottish. The centrality of wellbeing within the learning experience is now widely acknowledged as a pre-requisite for successful study, (Marshall & Morris 2011). The focus of this study was factors affecting wellbeing and the availability of support.

A document analysis showed considerable variation between the type and accessibility of the information provided; the lack of adequate signposting of resources was a problem. Even when students were appropriately directed to other resources, these were often deficient in detailed information. Key principles for information presentation are provided in the recommendations.

Data from students and staff identified two key problems for the provision of student support. The availability of services is often restricted to office hours making them inaccessible for trainee teachers given their heavy workload. Students may experience a reluctance to seek help for fear of how this may reflect on their ability to cope with the demands of the course and/or the profession. It was evident that a key form of support for many was found amongst their peers. It is recommended that this is a useful consideration when developing wellbeing strategies.

2 PROJECT OVERVIEW

2.1 BACKGROUND TO THE PROJECT

This research project sought to identify factors which affect the wellbeing of trainee teachers. Three key issues lead to this study: the central role of wellbeing in effective student learning; the requirement for support during the school experience; and the inherent problems around disclosure in the light of Fitness to Teach guidelines.

Higher education throughout the UK is becoming increasingly aware of the importance of wellbeing and the sector's responsibility for its enhancement; indeed Wisker (2011) proposes that wellbeing is ' essential for learners, enabling them to achieve their potential' (p5). Many UK universities provide counselling and other wellbeing provision for their students via a centralised student services function. Marshall (2011) discusses the importance of a whole-university approach where wellbeing is embedded in the systems and strategies, policies and procedures of the institution. This accords with Earwaker's proposal (1992) for an integrated curriculum model of personal tutoring that included timetabled group tutorials to provide a community of support for students. This is a pro-active or developmental approach which moves away from the problem-based, remedial approaches of other models (Thomas, 2006; Laycock, 2009).

For trainee teachers, as for other courses with professional placements, enhancing and supporting wellbeing should not be restricted to the time spent during the taught component of the course. Provision must also be made for the school experience. The intensity of workload associated with teacher training has been found to be an issue (Lee & Wilkes, 1999). Moreover Hobson *et al.* (2009) found that workload was a key factor in withdrawal, a finding echoed by Chambers *et al.* (2010) who linked withdrawal with the students' unrealistic expectations of life in the classroom. This could be because higher education institutions may not be delivering forms of learning that match the requirements of students for their school experience (Eilam & Poyas, 2009). Philpott (2006) has suggested that this may be related to a lack of

synthesis between the university curriculum and what is expected in the classroom; this gap between expectations and reality may be a product of a theory-practice divide. Such an interpretation of the problem places the responsibility of preparation on the institution rather than blaming the naivety of the students, as had been apparent in past research. Nonetheless the school experience can clearly be a stressful experience and a time when the student most needs support. Yet the timing of such placements may make it impossible for students to access university support at this critical time.

Those students who do experience mental or emotional problems may be reluctant to disclose for fear of stigmatisation (Quinn 2009). Trainee teachers may have a further barrier to disclosure in the light of the Fitness to Teach Guidelines (DfEE, 2000).   These were developed in accordance with DfEE circular 4/99 Physical and Mental Fitness to Teach of Teachers and of Entrants to Initial Teacher Training and exist to protect the health, safety, well-being and educational progress of school pupils. The guidance is also predicated on the fact that teachers' health and safety should not be put at risk by carrying out teaching duties, nor by compensating for an 'unfit' colleague. Generalised health standards for teachers and trainee teachers were abolished in Scotland in 2004 (DRC, 2007), so the guidance applies only to England and Wales. In both countries a fitness assessment of teacher training students takes place prior to the commencement of the programme of study, although this has been the subject of review to ensure it is commensurate with the new Equality Act (2010). Provision is made for those with a disability who wish to pursue a teaching career within the bounds of reasonable adjustment, but judgements about 'fitness to teach' based on a teacher's physical or mental health remains problematic. Fear of falling foul of the Fitness to Teach guidelines could deter trainees teachers who are experiencing emotional or mental problems from seeking the help and support they may need, and may deter them from applying to the profession at all (DRC, 2007).

These three issues shaped the aim of the study which was to initiate debate within the sector on the provision of support for trainee teachers by seeking the views of students and staff set against the policies of their respective universities.

2.2   Method

Three universities took part in the study, each from a different country within the UK: England, Scotland and Wales. However hereinafter the identity of the universities quoted is disguised through the use of semantically unrelated pseudonyms.

This study used a mixed methods approach to data collection. A document analysis was undertaken for each of the participating universities; an electronic survey collected both quantitative and qualitative data; and interviews and focus groups provided supplementary qualitative data.

DOCUMENT ANALYSIS

Programme and partnership documentation for all three universities taking part in the study was reviewed to appraise messages given to students about wellbeing matters. The documentation was also scanned for references to Fitness to Teach/Able to Teach. It was also considered relevant to review the material available to students via Schools of Education and Student Services websites.

ELECTRONIC SURVEY

Electronic surveys were used to collect data anonymously from students and mentors.

In each university all trainee teachers were invited to complete an electronic survey. The invitation was issued by a researcher explaining about the project within a scheduled lecture slot and providing details of how to log in to the survey. A total of 113 students completed this survey. The survey identified ten key aspects of the university learning experience and eight of the school placement, each of which were to be rated on a 5-point scale from Excellent to Poor, plus an evaluation of the transition process (4-point scale: Not at all easy to Very easy). There were also two identical wellbeing scales incorporating ten emotions, one concerning university and the other, school placement. These were to be rated on a 4-point scale of Often to Never. There was also an opportunity to provide comments on these issues.

Establishing contact with school mentors was problematic and required different approaches in the three locations. In one institution, Greenfields, a researcher

attended a mentor training session for both primary and secondary mentors and issued the invitation to take part in the electronic survey in person. In another, Broadlands, a researcher attended a mentor training session to issue the invitation and this was supplemented through the intervention of the administrative office responsible for liaising with schools, who contacted mentors directly to invite participation. For the third, Forest-End, it was only possible to contact mentors through the local county council who agreed to forward the invitation to the relevant schools.   A total of 50 mentors responded to the invitations and completed the online survey. The mentor survey asked for ratings of ten different aspects of their experience of mentoring (5-points, Excellent to Poor); it also included a rating scale to allow mentors to evaluate their experience (9 adjectives with a 4-point scale Often to Never) and open question for comments.

Interviews and Focus Groups

In each university, the staff approached for interview comprised lecturing staff on both the primary and secondary routes of the training programmes, those involved in partnerships with schools and staff from relevant student services. Students mostly took part in focus groups, although the two on the primary route in Forest-End were interviewed individually as the timing of placements precluded gathering a group together. The number of participants for each university is given in Table 1.

Table 1 Interview Participants by university

	Broadlands	Forest-End	Greenfields
Primary Post-Graduate:	6	2	5
Secondary Post-Graduate:	2	8	3
Total Students:	8	10	8
Support Staff:	4	5	7
Primary Academics:	2	6	3
Secondary Academics:	1	3	3
Total Academics:	3	9	6
Total:	15	24	21

The interviews were semi-structured in nature and those with the academic staff covered five key aspects of the student experience: nature of issues/problems raised

by students, university support services, support in placements, partnership issues and perceptions of Fitness to Teach. Interviews with the Support staff also included perceptions of Fitness to Teach along with student contact, disclosure and the issue of reasonable adjustments.

Half the agenda for the focus groups concerned their time in university and covered: workload, departmental support, and awareness of support services. The remaining half was about school placements and featured the key issues of preparation for placement and interpersonal relationships specifically with tutors and peers.

2.3 RESULTS

DOCUMENTARY ANALYSIS

The following documents were accessed and analysed. Contacts within each school indicated that these represented all relevant documentation.

Broadlands: Post-Graduate Primary Professional Practice Handbook, Post-Graduate Secondary Programme Handbook

Forest-End: Post-Graduate Primary Programme handbook, Post-Graduate Secondary Programme Handbook

Greenfields: Post-Graduate Primary Handbook, Post-Graduate Secondary Handbook, Primary Partnership Handbook, Secondary Partnership Handbook

Availability of service provision

Broadlands

The Broadlands Post-Graduate Primary Professional Practice handbook gives a list of contact details including those of the education student advisor, but there are no details of what services may be provided. The Broadlands Post-Graduate Secondary Programme Handbook gives the email address of the student advisors specifically allocated to the School of Education and explains briefly that they are able to provide information and advice on a wide range of programme issues including: assessment regulations; extenuating circumstances if, for exceptional reasons, the student is

unable to meet an assessment deadline or complete a placement; withdrawal; and accessing other services provided by the University, such as: the Dyslexia Service, the Disability Service, Counselling and Psychological Services, Wellbeing Service. No further details are given on what is actually provided by these services.

The Broadlands Post-Graduate Secondary Programme Handbook includes details of the library opening times as '24/7' during term time, with the school resources section open until 7.30pm weekdays and 10-4 Saturdays. Clearly attention has been given to the timetabling requirements of the students on school experience, taking account of their inability to access the services during normal office hours. Conversely there are no opening times given for the Student Advisor service. An email link and a telephone number is given for this service, which is indicated as the first port of call for students seeking information in relation to disability, dyslexia, counselling, psychological services, wellbeing services or extenuating circumstances. In fact a visit to the website confirms student advisors are available approximately 10-3 weekdays only, effectively ruling out any possibility of a face-to-face meeting for a trainee teacher. The counselling service has early evening appointments once a week. More specific information is given via the website.

Whilst it seems likely that the programme team would, during the induction process, deliver more details of student advisor services and other services provided centrally, there is little detailed written information to serve as a reference point for students who may not have retained it fully once the programme is underway.

Forest-End

The Forest-End Post-Graduate Primary Programme Handbook contains comprehensive information about a range of centrally-provided student support and welfare services, stating that these services exist to support an environment in which the wellbeing of students is paramount. The services are listed as including chaplaincy; counselling (including the following examples of matters about which a counsellor may be consulted: study-related issues; relationship difficulties; bereavement; change in life-style; addictions; depression; low self-esteem; eating disorders; sexuality and abuse, various support groups); university health service; and the welfare and advice service provided by the Students' Union. Again details

are given of the typical topics covered by the Students' Union: all money matters; accommodation issues; academic issues; academic appeals; financial implications of course changes; immigration issues; employment issues and personal matters. This helps to give an impression that wellbeing is taken seriously. In common with Broadlands, Forest-End also has student advisors specifically for the School of Education, and the Post-Graduate Primary handbook gives precise details of their contact information and availability. Perhaps surprisingly, given the requirement of the school experience placement, the student advisors are only available during office hours, effectively putting them out of reach for teacher training students when they are on block placement. The guidance to students makes it clear that student advisors, rather than personal tutors, should be the first port of call for more routine information about regulations and procedures, and for information about student services offered centrally by the university.

The Post-Graduate Secondary Handbook does not give as much information about student services. Instead it gives the URL for the range of centrally provided student support services. Although there is no specific information about these services and the circumstances in which a student may need to contact them, the URL takes the student directly to the more comprehensive information available to students via the university website, as detailed below. The Post-Graduate Secondary Handbook offers more details of support available from university staff than does the Primary handbook. The tutor with the personal tutoring role is given as the main personal contact within the university, and this member of staff is the first point of contact in the case of absence, academic or personal difficulties that might be affecting studies. Further staff roles are detailed in the mentoring and learning relationships section below.

Greenfields

Information about service provision appears relatively similar in both Primary and Secondary handbooks. A section on personal tutoring in both handbooks explains that a personal tutor will be allocated to each student at the beginning of the academic year, that this tutor will meet with the student on several occasions and will offer the opportunity to discuss anything that is worrying the student including pastoral issues. It is stated that the personal tutor will provide details of other

services available via student services, and that it may be necessary to make an appointment. Personal tutors are issued with university-wide guidance and school-specific guidance on the nature and boundaries of the personal tutoring role, but this information is not made available to students.

The Primary handbook also includes a section on pastoral care, explaining that the Programme Director has a general responsibility to keep in touch with each student throughout the year and to offer advice and guidance where appropriate. Students are advised that personal tutors should be the first point of contact when consultation of any sort is required. This pastoral care section also advises students that there is a counselling service, which is provided centrally by the University Student Services offering personal and confidential advice, and that Student Services also provide professional assistance for most areas of need, including assessment and support for students with disabilities and special needs, through the Greenfields Disability Team.

The Secondary handbook includes the statement: 'Remember that we, as Greenfields tutors, are here to help and advise you. If you have any worries, however small they may seem, please contact us. You can get in touch with your tutor in various ways, including through the Partnerships and Students' Administration Office' and contact details for this office are given.

Although not strictly-speaking a 'service', comprehensive information is given about a mitigating circumstances process which students can use to apply for exceptional circumstances to be considered in relation to academic performance. The personal tutor and Programme Director are given as the two points of contact for this process, which adds to an impression that these are the two primary roles for addressing any situation affecting a student's wellbeing. In the Partnership Handbook, it is stated that the university tutor, the mentor and the senior mentor also have pastoral roles. It would perhaps improve clarity for students if some typical scenarios were given to outline the types of situation in which a student would contact each of these five personnel.

Unlike the other two universities in the study, there is no provision for specific School of Education student advisors.

Mentoring and Other Learning Relationships

Broadlands

The Broadlands Primary Professional Practice handbook gives guidance on a 'quick fix' brief coaching/mentoring model for use in peer mentoring relationships. This gives students a steer in the direction of peer support. The document also includes clear guidance for school-based mentor relationships with students, including guidance on how to deal with situations where a student's performance is causing concern. There is no mention in this guidance about exploring the possibility of a wellbeing issue being a causal factor for students coming into this category. The same omission occurs in the guidance for the drawing up of a professional improvement plan. Although guidance to students in the 'at risk of failing' category states that the student should try not to worry and that teachers and tutors will continue to give advice, there is no further guidance about how the situation of being 'at risk of failing' might affect wellbeing. An opportunity has been lost here to provide links to the wellbeing information on the university website.

The Secondary programme handbook refers to three other learning relationships for the student including the Group Tutor, who provides academic and pastoral mentoring in a group setting in response to individual trainees' needs. Neither of the other two relationships include a pastoral remit; there is a Personal Tutor who is a subject specialist and assists with reflection and portfolio-building and a Professional Studies Tutor who delivers lectures and leads seminar groups and remains the link with academic aspects of the programme whilst the students are on school experience placement. The information on these roles is quite brief, and it might have been useful to include examples of the types of scenario that might be taken to each of these three tutors.

Forest-End

At Forest-End the Post-Graduate Primary programme handbook explains to students the personal tutoring role which includes advice and signposting on academic as well as pastoral matters. The university has produced a comprehensive guide for personal tutors on what is included in the role, and the boundaries of the role,

together with guidance on sensitive referral to other services. This is not provided to students but makes it absolutely clear to personal tutors where their role begins and ends. More specific information on these and other roles was provided to the study by the programme director but is not included in programme documentation.

The Post-Graduate Secondary handbook offers more detail on the learning relationships with the curriculum-specific tutors who organise the subject specialism part of the course. These tutors are involved in the assessment of assignments and of the students' performance whilst on school experience placement. There are two further tutors, one for each of the two remaining sections of the university programme of study. Guidance to students is very specific in terms of 'what to do if it all goes wrong'. The tutor with the personal tutoring role is to be the first point of contact, and he or she may refer the student to one of the other tutors or the programme director, depending on the nature of the issue.

Both the primary and secondary handbooks refer to the means by which students may have their views represented to the School of Education and the University as a whole.

No specific documentation on university-school partnerships was supplied.

Greenfields

Greenfields primary and secondary programmes have common content for the Partnership Handbook. The first section begins by outlining the roles of mentors, university tutors, students, head teacher and external examiners. There is a section on students' minimum entitlements and what is expected of students. This is restricted to learning, teaching and assessment, making no reference to pastoral issues. Details are given of the functions of three specific roles: University Tutor(first point of contact when supporting student teachers' school-based professional development, particularly where student teachers are experiencing difficulties of a personal or professional kind); Senior Mentor (includes a pastoral role for student teachers and being available to counsel student teachers when necessary); Mentor (includes role modelling for the student teacher to share good practice, adopting a pastoral, coaching and supporting role). Whilst this gives a number of different

options for students who may be experiencing wellbeing issues, it is not clear how these functions differ from those of the personal tutor.

So, whilst there are a number of learning, teaching and assessment tutors who have pastoral or wellbeing roles built into their role descriptors, the information is scattered thinly throughout the first section of the partnership handbook. There is little detail of the types of pastoral/wellbeing services these tutors would assist with, and the information might easily be overlooked. As with Broadlands, it seems likely that this information would be given at induction, but this offers little in the way of a reference point for students throughout the academic year.

The second section of the partnership handbook gives guidance for mentors, indicating that the mentor should enable students to gain a realistic understanding of the teaching profession whilst making sure the student is not 'turned off'. Mentors are advised to inform students of the rewards of a teaching career as well as the drawbacks. At the same time mentors are required to be a 'critical friend' maintaining a personal, supportive relationship whilst keeping it professional. There is extremely detailed information about the learning, teaching and assessment roles of mentors, including guidance on what to do when a student is in the category of 'significant improvement required' (SIR). There is no mention of the role of pastoral support in these situations, no indication that pastoral issues might be a causal factor, nor is there acknowledgement that pastoral needs may develop as a result of being in SIR status. There is also information on very specific procedures on the induction of new mentors, and requirements for continued attendance at training events in order to establish and clarify the nature of the role.

It is noteworthy that there is a student evaluation pro-forma which includes a request for comments on support, guidance and wellbeing. There is also information on how students may have their views represented to the university, and much is made of student representatives and student voice.

Disability/Fitness

Broadlands

The Broadlands Post-Graduate Programme Handbook explains briefly that students with disabilities may seek advice on reasonable adjustment via the student advisors. There is no mention of the implications of disability or health-related issues in relation to the particular requirements of trainee teachers.

A section in the programme handbook on assessment and disability notes the university's recognition of students' entitlement to claim reasonable adjustment to the format of an existing assessment task on grounds that are 'disability-related'. Students are advised to speak to the nominated 'disability contact' in their department, and it is made clear that this must be done promptly in order to facilitate the required information and adjustments. There is no further information on whom to contact or how to do so. It is also stated that students should contact their Student Advisers in the first instance. The potential for confusion here is quite strong.

Forest-End

The Post-Graduate Primary Handbook includes information about disability issues which, although it has the feel of university-wide standardised information, gives a clear message that the institution will cater for the needs of disabled students. Words such as 'welcome' and 'accessible' give off a strong cultural message that disability is taken seriously here. In common with Broadlands and Greenfields, specific mention is made of dyslexia, but Forest-End is unique in the study by mentioning the needs of students with mental health issues. A contact person is given specifically for answering the needs of education students with physical disabilities, dyslexia or mental health issues. Further contact details are given for the services of advisors at the central disability office, and the handbook specifies that these advisors deal with physical adaptations; support in the library; examination arrangements; applications for Disabled Students' Allowance; information about available technology and personal assistance such as note takers, proof readers or dyslexia tutors. The university uses the term 'teachability' to denote an inclusive approach, and the programme handbook gives precise details of the manner in which a needs profile

will be provided in order to recommend the appropriate adjustments. Whilst provision of adjustments a legislative requirement for all universities, the fact that it is included in the handbook gives a clear message that disability and associated adjustments are taken seriously by the university.

There is no mention of the implications of disability or health-related issues in relation to the particular requirements of trainee teachers.

Greenfields

The factor that distinguishes Greenfields from the other two universities in the sample is its emphasis on Fitness to Teach guidance. This is featured particularly prominently in the Primary Partnership Handbook under the heading 'Physical and Medical Fitness to Teach'. This makes clear that all students must complete the relevant Declaration of Health form, that entry to the programme is conditional on satisfactory medical clearance; and that some students may be required by the University Medical Officer to attend for a medical examination. It is also stated clearly that students should inform Student Health Service/Programme Director of any change in health status, including pregnancy. Students are advised that any change in medical conditions may require an examination based on medical fitness to teach, which would be undertaken by the University Medical Officer in the first instance. Several links are given to the various guides on Fitness to Teach and Able to Teach. In contrast, the Secondary handbook makes a much more low key point, stating simply that students are required to meet the Secretary of State's requirements for physical and mental fitness to teach as detailed in TDA's document 'Able To Teach' (2007) but giving no further information.

Attendance

All three programme handbooks stress the importance of the attendance requirement and the implications of absence. Any sort of absence must be authorised by the programme team using appropriate documentation. Forest-End is the most specific listing a range of categories and lengths of absence, and the associated expectations for students. For all three universities it could perhaps be argued that there should be more synthesis between the guidance on

attendance/absence and the guidance on support mechanisms, as there is likely to be interdependence between the two issues.

Websites

Broadlands

The Student Services homepage has a section 'Personal Stuff' split into *Looking After Myself (mind, body and spirit)* and *Looking for Help (When you feel overwhelmed, isolated, anxious or low, or want to talk to someone)*. The *Looking After Myself* section contains extensive information on self-help activities and resources for spiritual, physical and mental wellbeing. There is also a section on connecting which puts emphasis on the importance of spending time with others. The *Looking For Help* section includes university-provided support (including group work), medical services and further extensive information on self-help. The site is designed and presented with a modern appearance and an adult tone.

The School of Education website has a link to the central student services information, as well as a link to a page about the School of Education student advisors giving contact details and brief information about the services they can provide.

The section on disability contains quite standard information on the support and services offered for students. This would appear to have been designed to comply with the university's legislative obligations. There is a section offering information to staff on the university's obligations regarding disability matters.

Forest-End

The Forest-End student services website has a section on health and welfare with links to academic and practical advice services provided by the Students' Union, student counselling, the university health centre, chaplaincy and the disability office. The counselling site offers information on self-help and group work. Although this is less prominent than that on the Broadlands website, the links lead to a range of ideas including bibliotherapy and exercise. There is an extensive alphabetical list of links to a range of websites for services, advice and self-help. The website is not as

well designed as the Broadlands site, and is quite institutional in character, appearing to be aimed at the younger student.

The School of Education website has links to the central student services information.

Unlike the other two university websites, which have specific sections on disability on the student services home page, the Forest-End site has its disability section within the health and welfare section. Once in the Disability Office section, there are links to the Disability Equality Scheme as well as to the services offered to students. The School of Education website has links for students and for staff to Teachability guidance which takes a developmental approach to anti-discriminatory learning and teaching practice for disabled students.

Greenfields

The Greenfields student services site is relatively limited compared with those of Broadlands and Forest-End. There is a strong institutional character to the design and tone, and the site is quite basic in the information it offers. There are links to basic information about health, disability and counselling. From the counselling link there are links to a relatively limited list of external organisations. The most useful link is Students Against Depression which contains some self-help information. The fact that this self-help information is hidden within an external website means there is less emphasis overall on self-help techniques when compared with the sites of the other two universities. There is no information on group work, and a check with the counselling service revealed that group work is not offered at Greenfields. There are links to information on the signs and symptoms of stress and how to cope with this. These links appear to be offered only from the disability services website. There is a section on disability which gives basic information on the practical services provided to help and support students with their studies.

The section on disability contains quite standard information on the support and services offered for students. This would appear to have been designed to comply with the university's legislative obligations. There is a section offering information to staff on the university's obligations regarding disability matters.
There is no information on health and wellbeing on the School of Education website.

Overall Summary

Throughout the handbook and partnership documentation of all three universities, terms such as 'advice' and 'support' were used extensively in relation to learning and teaching matters, but less emphasis was placed on advice and support regarding wellbeing issues. In all three cases information was given about which tutors or mentors dealt with pastoral or student support issues, but this information was sometimes confusing or contradictory, and in some cases was scattered quite thinly throughout the documentation.

Post-Graduate training programmes at all three universities were subject to guidance, whether in the form of Fitness to Teach or fitness to practice, yet only one of the handbooks referred to the existence and implications of guidance. It is difficult to ascertain from the documentation why this should be the case. Disability information tended to be concentrated in one place, but there was no real sense of ownership of this information on the part of the programme team. Forest-End's Primary handbook was unique in communicating a coherent message that the university takes disability and mental health extremely seriously, and provided more specific details of the routes towards advice and support, including a first point of contact with the School of Education Advisors.

All of the programme and partnership handbooks contained so much extensive information about assessment, learning outcomes, submission schedules, competencies and standards, that it is hardly surprising that the information on wellbeing is somewhat lost. We were not made aware of any specific wellbeing resources for Post-Graduate students. It would have been helpful to see all of the information on wellbeing written or clearly promoted as a separate booklet or electronic resource in the programme documentation, or at least as a very specific collated section within the programme handbooks.

ELECTRONIC SURVEY

Students

Of the 113 respondents, 81 were female; 54 were undertaking primary school training and 58 doing secondary. Males were predominantly training for secondary

school whilst females were training for primary. Just over half the respondents (64) were in the 20-24 age-group, a further 22 in their late twenties and 18 in their thirties, 7 were in their forties and just one in his fifties. In order to reassure participants of their anonymity, the survey did not require them to identify where they were studying. One person did not answer any questions, and a further eight had substantial missing data so the information presented below is based on approximately N=104.

The ratings for the key aspects of their course both at university and on the school experience were largely positive; the most positive related to the school experience, the least to the lectures, where less than half rated them as above adequate. The open comments about the university experience were largely negative whilst those about the school experience were mixed.

Ratings for support indicated that peer support was perceived most favourably although members of staff, both university tutors and school mentors, were also rated positively by some but others voicing problems. Availability of personal tutors appeared to be a problem for some. Open comments showed a range of responses, some very positive, some mixed and some worryingly negative. Overall it seems evident that many have very positive experiences; for the most part they know that it is going to be challenging and are prepared for that. The problem is that this is not a universal experience. Those who encounter difficulties may feel unsupported and alone.

The Wellbeing Scale was significantly higher for the school placement than for university indicating that the respondents had a positive response to being on the school experience. Participants were also asked to rate how easy they found the transition from university to school placement. Slightly less than half reported the transition as *Easy* or *Very Easy*. There was some indication of a relationship between these scores and those of the wellbeing scales. Those who found the transition *Not at all easy* were the only group of students who had higher wellbeing scores for the university than for the school.

Mentors

In total 50 mentors completed the electronic survey. There were no evident differences between those working in primary (12) and those in secondary (38) so these data are presented only by university. The majority worked with Broadlands or Greenfields. Because of the nature of recruitment of mentors with Forest-End, this sample included some that were affiliated with other universities.   These are presented below but are excluded from further quantitative analyses as it is not possible to ascertain whether all six come from one institution, making inferences unreliable. They were asked how often they attended mentor training sessions and the most positive response came from Greenfields, the least from Forest-End. Indeed four mentors claimed they had never attended a training session, all of whom worked with Forest-End.

Mentors were asked to rate different aspects of their experience with the university. There were significant differences on ratings primarily about communication from the university with Broadlands scoring highest, Forest-End lowest, and Greenfields consistently in the middle. A similar pattern was noted in the wellbeing scores for mentors with Broadlands' mentors reporting the most positive picture Forest-End's the least; again Greenfields' scores were in the middle. Amongst the open text responses, positive themes are common, the most frequently occurring is that being a mentor is a very rewarding experience. Where problems were cited, they related to the varied quality of trainees and the lack of recognition for the mentoring role in the teacher's workload.

INTERVIEWS AND FOCUS GROUPS

Academic Staff

Academic tutors across each of the institutions appeared to have a sound understanding of the variety of both the personal and academic issues with which students presented. In particular, the intensive nature of the workload was a major factor of which tutors were aware. They reported that high achieving students and 'perfectionists' often struggled to maintain their own high standards when faced with volume of work during the university-based learning. All the tutors expressed

willingness to provide students with ample academic advice and guidance either through email or face-to-face contact.

However, there appeared to be a varied response about the tutors' willingness to deal with students' personal issues and their confidence to do so. A key factor was knowing when to refer to students for professional assistance from student services. Despite the varying views on offering pastoral care, most of the tutors had a sound understanding of the diversity of university services available for students in need of support. Although students were routinely provided with this information at the beginning of the academic year, staff acknowledged that information overload at Induction meant that students might not be aware of the wider university support services later in the year.

Senior tutors in particular were also aware of the stigmatisation around wanting to seek advice and referral from an academic tutor as students feared it might be perceived as a sign of weakness; worse still, they feared it might have negative connotations for their academic progress.

Tutors involved in visiting student teachers on placement saw their role as involving both academic and wellbeing support. They indicated that they believed that the school placement was the most common time for students to encounter difficulties that affect wellbeing, and recalled a variety of instances ranging in severity whereby the student-mentor relationship was particularly challenging for the student's wellbeing. However, it is important to recognise that tutors recalled very positive instances of a sound working relationship between school mentors and student teachers. According to the tutors, the success of the relationship could often, but not always, be measured by the student teacher's level of progress. Tutors reported that if there was an irretrievable breakdown in the relationship, there were logistical difficulties moving students to alternative schools due to the shortage of places within schools or because the student only had a limited time left at the placement. There appeared to be inevitable tensions between wanting to ensure students were adequately supported and the need for them to establish and maintain professionalism.

Tutors indicated that the characteristic of a good partnership was the establishment of a good working relationship between the school and tutors, and that includes effective communication. Face to face university-based training was highly regarded by the academic tutors as it was a key method to communicate to mentors the responsibilities and expectations of both them as 'mentors' or 'coaches' and the student teachers. Mentor training uptake was considered average but remained inadequate. Broadlands was the only institution to offer in-school training for those mentors who were unable to attend university courses as a result of inconvenience or staff shortage. Such face to face contact was also said to have enhanced the relationship between the university as a whole and the schools involved. One particular member of academic staff reported that whilst school visits were a resolution to the lack of attendance at training sessions, they preferred the notion of mentors coming together and sharing a 'community of practice and building peer relationships amongst mentors.'

Knowledge of the existence of Fitness to Teach was good across the three institutions, and tutors from two of these were able to give anecdotal examples of positive outcomes whereby student teachers with physical difficulties and mental health issues had undergone the processes relating to Fitness to Teach and were regarded 'fit'. However tutors remained cautious and sceptical about the impact Fitness to Teach could have on prospective student teachers and in particular those with mental health issues.

Support Staff

Each student services from all three institutions explained the importance of their attending induction sessions at the beginning of the academic year to engage with the student teachers and ensure they had a degree of awareness of both the support services' existence and diversity of support available to them. This was seen as a necessary but not sufficient way of alerting students to their services.

Greenfields and Forest-End acknowledged that the support services were centralised and the education department was often physically located outside the main 'hub' of the university and this could have affected the level of contact with student teachers. Broadlands had an additional conduit for student teachers through

an on-site departmental student advisor to heighten the capacity to contact support services. This proved to be a useful network to facilitate the contact between student teachers and the wider support services whereby the student advisor would triage issues and refer if necessary.

Whilst reasons for contact were similar to other cohorts of university students, gaining access to the necessary support services was recognised as notoriously difficult for student teachers. In all three, student services were open during standard office hours. Due to the course structure of Greenfields, students were in university one day a week, every week, so in theory sustained contact with the university and its support services could have been easier. However, discussions with support staff revealed that a combination of the restricted opening office hours (9-5) and the intensity of a student teacher's university day meant there was only a small window of opportunity when both the student teacher and member of support staff would be accessible. It seemed that during times where student teachers seem to have more issues and are more likely to be 'at risk' is also the time when accessing support is at its most difficult. This was acknowledged by all three support services as a limitation and was perceived to be a direct consequence of depleted resources and funding.

As for disclosing problems (physical or mental) for which support might be needed, the first opportunity to do this was the UCAS application form. The support services from all three institutions would then follow this up with a formal letter requesting contact to discuss the implementation for support. Yet the number of student teacher's disclosing at this stage was very low and those who did disclose seldom took action at this point. Reasons for delayed disclosure were often linked with a fear factor that they would be discriminated against by particular members of staff, barred from the profession, stigmatised as incompetent prospective teachers and the perception that they 'just had to get on with it'.

Greenfields support staff were familiar with the 'Fitness to Teach' guidance and its implementation, but it did not seem to have the same resonance in the other two institutions. Regardless of whether Fitness to Teach was applied, deciding a student teacher's suitability to teach was informed by academic tutors at the university and support services such as the disability office were only involved in recommendations

if requested by the department. They suggested the formalised nature of the guidance and use of the term 'fit' deterred student teachers from wanting to disclose and receive such support in fear that they might be labelled 'unfit' and would have to deal with the negative consequences of such a judgement.

Overall support staff were pleased with the progress in being able to implement or suggest sources of reasonable adjustments but argued that disclosure was paramount for the student teacher's own sake to allow them to complete the competencies required for the course.

Students

Across all three institutions the workload of the ITE course was described as 'hectic' and 'intensive' amongst both primary and secondary students. Despite knowing about the intensive structure of the course in advance, students expressed concern at the difference between their preconceived expectations of the course and the more exacting reality. However, students across all three HEIs agreed that their stresses with the workload were directly related to the volume rather than the level of work that was expected of them.

In all three institutions, student teachers were allocated departmental tutors as a first port of call on the course but the boundaries of the tutors' roles were not always clear to the students. Some students expressed a 'fear factor' of requesting pastoral support from the allocated tutors with concerns that their personal weaknesses and any detriment to their wellbeing could cast them with a negative label whilst acknowledging that this fear was a perception rather than a declaration that tutors were unresponsive to non-academic issues. Students had different understandings and interpretations of the tutor role and the barriers between academic and pastoral support.

Whilst the students knew of the existence of the university's support services, their knowledge of the diversity of services available was limited. However, the majority of students felt that such knowledge was on a 'need to know' basis and would explore this in more detail if applicable to them. Those students who accessed the support services felt it was a very positive and effective experience and found the support to

be very accommodating and useful. A major barrier to access was linked to the intensive ITE timetable and fear of being absent from compulsory lectures to attend support sessions, which reflects very much what was said in the staff interviews.

Overall students across all three institutions felt well prepared for their first placement experience with only a few isolated instances of logistical problems with placement arrangements. Each student across all three institutions was assigned a classroom teacher/subject mentor and a senior mentor as their school-based support mechanisms during school placement although in some instances this role would be occupied by one person depending on the school's situation. This was not always a problem for students as their placement experiences were largely positive but it was perceived as a potential threat if students felt unsupported in the school. Differences across institutions were undetectable; however differences between the primary and secondary cohorts from all three institutions were noticeable. The primary student teachers' relationship with their mentor or classroom teacher was very variable whereas the secondary student teachers reported much more positive relationships with their school mentors. It is difficult to make inferences about the difference in relationships between primary and secondary student teachers but the secondary cohort described the close-knit community of the subject departments as well as their individual mentor. The notion of a departmental community was not evident from the primary student teacher responses relating to in-school support and relationships and could be a possible explanation for the variable experiences.

Whilst the overall responses from students were positive, it is also important to note some quite severe instances of negative student-mentor relationships and the determining impact this had on the student experience. These negative instances range in severity but include cases of hostility, bullying and issues relating to the ambiguity of the mentor role and responsibilities. Similar to the allocation of university tutors, students often referred to the allocation and relationship with school mentors as a 'lottery'. The same could be said of the approachability of the school but in general this seemed to have less of a direct bearing on the student teachers.

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Despite the varied relationship with school mentors and university tutors, student teachers managed to maintain a sense of both formal and informal peer community whilst on placement. Formalised peer support organised by the institution varied across all three universities in how they attempted to encourage peer support. In each institution, students seemed to maintain regular contact and communication with their small peer groups via a social networking site, emails or text. As the students were allocated to small groups for university-based learning, they were able easily to establish small communities within their cohort and felt it was very important to maintain these during placement often to share practice and offload worries or frustration. This appeared to be the most important and reliable form of support for students.

Recommendations

Based on these findings the research team offers the following recommendations. All but the last two do not require significant increase in resources, an important factor given the cut-backs in the sector, although some will take time to implement.

A specific wellbeing resource – written or clearly promoted as an electronic resource in the programme documentation. All three handbooks place great emphasis on communicating learning outcomes and schedules, meaning that the wellbeing information is difficult to find.

Reviewing handbook documentation -   much appears to be written as a comprehensive account of what the institution (or department) does. Consider instead what the student needs to know and re-order/rearrange accordingly.

Develop means to support on peer mentoring and self-help amongst students.

More links to be made between 'at risk of failing' or 'significant improvements required' and wellbeing issues.

Professional preparation – they all mention that teaching is robust and challenging but also has its rewards.

Ownership and culture of wellbeing issues

Education-based student advisors

Ensuring opening hours of student services take account of the demands of the teacher training timetable.

2.4 Project Impact

The mixed methods approach of this study has provided the project team with data on which the above recommendations are based. The key principle underlying our dissemination strategy is to ensure that these recommendations are available to, and considered by, providers of teacher training throughout the UK.   If our recommendations are adopted the impact will be both long- and short-term.

- Improvement in documentary and web-resources on wellbeing available to students
- Availability of support services
- Enabling students to seek help through reducing the fear of the consequences
- Provision of proactive rather than reactive support
- Integration of wellbeing into the curriculum

We feel that some impact has already been achieved via dissemination at the TEAN/MHHE and ESCalate conferences. We were especially encouraged by interest in the project at the TEAN/MHHE conference and made contacts with teacher training tutors from a number of UK universities who were interested to hear more about our work. There was particular interest in discussing the implications of 'Fitness to Teach' both in the formal policy sense, and also in terms of the practice implications for students and teachers who are affected by physical or mental health conditions. We therefore plan to remain in touch with policy discussion around 'fitness to teach' via UCET and other networks.

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3 OUTPUTS

We have presented our preliminary findings at two conferences to date:

Huyton, J., Sanders, L. & Hillier, E. (2011) Factors affecting well-being of trainee teachers –early findings. TEAN/MHHE symposium 'Mental well-being and the curriculum; making the connections in ITE'. March 30th 2011, University of Cumbria, Lancaster campus

Huyton, J., Sanders, L. & Hillier, E. (2011) Wellbeing factors in the vocational preparation of student teachers for the school experience placement . ESCalate Third Annual Student Conference 11 April 2011; Liverpool Hope University

4   DETAILS OF FURTHER PLANNED DISSEMINATION

We wish to present our findings as staff development seminars to the staff involved in teaching and supporting trainee teachers in each of the three institutions that took part to promote discussion and the sharing of best practice.

We will submit an abstract to present a talk at the Higher Education Academy Annual Conference 2012.

We envisage writing two research papers based on our findings for publication in peer review journals (e.g. British Educational Research Journal, Studies in Higher Education, Teaching in Higher Education, Higher Education, Journal of Education for Teaching, British Journal of Counselling and Guidance).   One paper will focus on the provision of support, drawing on these findings to identify best practice. The second paper will focus on the student voice and their experience.

We plan to draft a framework detailing minimum standards for the presentation of wellbeing services for students within an institution. We will publish this for discussion across the sector. Such an agreed framework would reduce duplication of effort across institutions and also ensure that all trainee teachers had access to the same quality of information to support them through their training. (We would include this in the talks as well as a separate paper.)

We plan to produce further data by carrying out focus groups with school-based mentors. This had not proved possible within the timescale of the project, given the time constraints of the mentors. It is hoped we may be able to convene focus groups during mentor training sessions in the new academic year.

5 EXPENDITURE PROFILE

Submitted to EScalate

6 SUMMARY FOR ESCALATE

How do we, as institutions, provide our trainee teachers with the support they need to complete the course and enter the profession? This study investigated the provision of support in three universities, one each in England, Wales and Scotland. Using a mixed methods approach, this research team analysed the university documents for each of the participating courses and sought the views of students, academic staff, support staff and mentors, employing a combination of electronic surveys, focus groups and interviews.

The documentary analysis showed that the necessary information on student support was not always easily accessible. In some cases the plethora of information on the learning and teaching aspects of the course swamped the supplementary information relevant to wellbeing. In other places, information about where to go for help, and when was thinly spread across extensive documentation making it a complex and challenging job to find the detail. One of the universities showed an exemplary approach to enhancing wellbeing in their documents; it was evident that the institution placed wellbeing at the heart of the experience, unfortunately this was not reflected in their website. Another institution provided an excellent website, taking account of the adult learner's needs and maturity; however, their documentation was less accessible.

Staff and students discussed the heavy workload for trainee teachers and acknowledged that this presented difficulties for those who wished to seek help from student services which kept office hours. Only one university placed the Fitness to Teach guidance at the heart of its training provision. Nevertheless it was evident from all three that students may experience a reluctance to seek help for fear that it will have reflect poorly on their ability to handle the course or to qualify as a teacher. Whether in university or on school placement, students found their peers to be their main source of support.