

# *Initial Teacher Education and Training: A New Opportunity for Partnership in Wales*

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## ABSTRACT

The National Assembly Government has declared its intention to introduce new requirements for courses of Initial Teacher Education and Training (ITET) for implementation in September 2004. The current requirements for such courses rely on a 'partnership with schools' model which, given the introduction of new requirements in England from September 2003 and the emphasis on this model, is unlikely to be removed from the Welsh courses. Although the 'partnership with schools' model has been in operation for the past decade and has been acknowledged by all participants as a positive model for ITET, there are considerable constraints that inhibit further development. It is essential that the factors restricting quality, consistency and parity of experience for student-teachers are identified, acknowledged and examined before attempting to initiate new requirements. Any attempt by the National Assembly Government to increase the level of expectation on either schools or ITET providers, without addressing the existing constraints, will increase the strain on the model and could result in a set of requirements that is impossible to meet. The purpose of this article is to initiate a debate that will address the shape and structure of a 'partnership with schools model' for the delivery of ITET courses in Wales. To provide a background for the debate, this article will examine research studies undertaken during the past five years into aspects of the current model, and will draw upon the findings and recommendations of these studies. Attention will be given to the newly published requirements for ITET courses in England and to the process of consultation undertaken to achieve these. Ultimately, the aim of the article is to focus attention on the perceived needs for the 'partnership with schools' model in Wales, as the

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country prepares to consult on the revision of the existing standards for ITET and devise a new set of requirements.

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*Background*

Initial Teacher Education in Wales is provided by eight higher education institutions (HEIs), all members of the University of Wales with the exception of one partnership which involves the University of Glamorgan. The Welsh Assembly Government sets the annual recruitment requirements for Initial Teacher Education and Training (ITET) and the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales (HEFCW) establishes the individual target allocation of each HEI. The total intake allocation for Wales for the academic year 2003–04 is 2,470 (1,320 secondary and 1,150 primary) students. Additionally, the National Assembly Government allocates 50 places for the Graduate and Registered Teacher Programme that is independent of both HEFCW and the HEIs.

Initial steps toward formalizing the relationship between schools and ITET providers were taken by the government with the introduction of Welsh Office Circular 35/92 (Welsh Office, 1992) for the training of secondary teachers. This required schools to assume greater responsibility for the training of teachers through collaborative or ‘partnership’ agreements with ITET providers. The 1994 Education Act not only established the partnership model for teacher training but introduced an increased role for schools by permitting them to take the lead, making use of higher education staff only where they believed their contribution to be desirable. Within Wales, few schools have decided to offer ITET courses independent of the traditional HEIs. The approach, in Wales, has continued to be a partnership between the schools and the HEIs.

During the two-year period, 1992–4, the schools had moved from a support role in ITET to at least an ‘equal partner’ position, which was strengthened further by subsequent regulations (Welsh Office, 1998). This move to empower schools has been supported, in the main, by the traditional providers, as they recognize the significant contribution that schools make to the training process and the value that such close working relationships can add to their ITET courses. The partnership model has moved the placement elements of ITET courses from a simple ‘teaching practice’ approach, where classroom teachers had little formal input to the design, monitoring and assessment of the trainee’s experience, to a ‘school experience’ approach that embraces many

more of the aspects of the teacher's role within the 'life' of the school. In an attempt, initially, to meet legislative requirements, schools and HEIs have developed clear roles and responsibilities for participating staff and efficient processes to prepare and support student-teachers to meet the standards for qualified teacher status (QTS) and to enter the profession. However, the need for speed in designing the partnership model in order to meet the requirements for accreditation has resulted in what Furlong et al. (1996) describe as the 'HEI-led partnership'.

This early introduction of the requirement, on the part of the existing HEI providers, to develop partnerships with schools, was not a smooth transition from the established 'teaching practice' to the 'school experience' model. Unfortunately, the requirement was introduced with little consultation and resulted in only small numbers of schools 'signing-on' during the critical stages and the professional associations advocating caution in the face of a possible increase in teacher workload, for little remuneration (Ring, 1995; UCET, 1995). The situation has, however, improved considerably and now the majority of schools, in both England and Wales, in proximity to an HEI, ITET provider, participate in the preparation of the next generation of teachers.

### *Development*

With the advent of a partnership model for ITET, the educational research community gave considerable attention to the issues surrounding the development of effective models for partnership and descriptions of embryonic structures (Benton, 1990; Booth, Furlong and Wilkin, 1990; Alpin, 1994). This early attention to the models for partnership was superseded by an interest in the development of mentoring practice and numerous texts appeared that provided useful advice and guidance for those engaged in the process (Hagger, Burn and McIntyre, 1993; Fish, 1995; Tomlinson, 1995). As the various models for partnership with schools have developed, the attention of researchers has been maintained with both the effectiveness of mentoring and the efficiency of implementation being investigated.

Before considering the ways in which the Welsh Assembly Government may attend to the revision of the existing requirements for the ITET programmes, it is appropriate to draw upon the findings of some of these research studies. By recognizing the anxieties expressed by the participants in partnership and by giving them due consideration, as factors inhibiting the

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effectiveness of the process, the new regulations may be framed to alleviate many of the concerns.

Predominantly, the issue of resources dominates the findings from investigative studies into the effectiveness of partnership delivery. Initially, the cause for concern centred upon the amount of funding which was transferred from the HEI to the school. This issue is now less prevalent for many providers was the case some years ago; however, the essence of this aspect remains but has been clarified, through experience, and is represented in a number of related resource areas.

Throughout the research studies of the last five years, it is apparent that the request from the schools for increased funding has moved from a 'feeling' that the money is insufficient to support the responsibilities ascribed to the roles, to an identification of where additional resources are needed to improve the quality of provision and support for the student teachers. A consistent finding of the studies has been the request for additional time for the school-based mentors to fulfil the roles that they have adopted, acknowledging that they are not able to provide sufficient support for the student-teachers undertaking school experience in their institution (Geen, Bassett and Douglas 1998; 1999a; 1999b; 2000; 2001). The recommendations made for each of these studies include the need for 'protected' time for school-based mentors to meet regularly with their student-teachers. This concern has been repeated in a recent study of mentors, conducted during a series of Teacher Training Agency (TTA) Regional Conference meetings in, February 2002 (Bassett, unpublished) where 94 per cent ( $n = 137$ ) of respondents agreed with the statement 'Mentors should be given a specified allocation of non-contact time to support their trainee teachers'.

The consequence of inadequate funding is not limited to the provision of non-contact time. The studies cited highlight the need for a programme of mentor training to 'induct' new mentors and to develop further the skills of existing mentors. In a study concentrating on the selection and training of mentors, Geen (2001) discovered that 42 per cent ( $n = 97$ ) of the senior mentors questioned had received neither initial training nor subsequent training to support them in their role. This statistic exemplifies the concerns expressed by participants in the partnership model and reflects the findings of a Higher Education Funding Council (HEFCW) meeting on 3 June 1997 (Geen, Bassett and Douglas 1998: 45), where 70 per cent of the participants supported the need for regular mentor training sessions which concentrated on:

the planning of students' induction; guided classroom observation; forms of collaborative teaching; strategies for supporting students' classroom experience and developing their knowledge of educational issues; skills vital to the mentor's role (for example effective listening, encouraging students to reflect upon experience, reviewing progress, debriefing and target setting); assessment . . . and techniques of profiling.

The need for ongoing mentor training was also supported by the Office of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Schools in Wales (OHMCI, 1998: 8) with the statement: 'If quality of provision and standards are to improve further, there is a need for more funding for the training of mentors, and quality assurance needs to be developed further.' Again, in the recent survey of mentors during the TTA Regional Conference meetings, the need for mentor training was supported by 99 per cent ( $n = 137$ ) of the participants when asked to respond to the statement 'Mentors should attend at least one mentor training event per year'. Considerable support (81 per cent) was also given, by the same mentors, to the statement 'The money transferred to schools must be used to support the trainee teachers during their placement or for the training of mentors'. The desire to engage with mentor training appears to be supported by both school-based mentors and HEI tutors and is recognized as a means not only of raising the quality of the experience provided for the students but also of achieving excellent professional development for school-based staff (Geen et al, 2000). The obstacle to this development must be attributed to a lack of funding and it would be difficult for the providers to transfer further resources from their existing funding.

An interesting development in the debate over finance appeared in a Welsh Office publication (1999: 35) that recognized the cost implications of the partnership approach to ITET and indicated that the funding methodology would be reviewed:

We intend to review funding arrangements to ensure that they recognise the role of schools as equal partners. In particular, we will consult on the case for funding the higher education/school partnership directly rather than channelling funding for partner schools through higher education institutions.

### *Implications*

Given the varied nature of each provider's programme and the use made of the time spent in schools, such an approach would be difficult to administer.

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Of greater interest is that this proposal was made with no explanation of the reasons which gave rise to the view and that no suggestions were offered of ways in which such a model would be implemented nor of the way in which such a proposal would be funded. Certainly, the administration of partnership represents a significant cost for the majority of HEI providers, but the direct payment of funds to schools could stifle some of the creative solutions that have been applied in compensating for underfunding to date. It is not surprising, therefore, that this suggestion has not been revived and that no further announcement has been made. Already, providers in England have withdrawn from ITET because of financial constraints associated with the delivery of the programmes, (for example, Liverpool University) and others have considered the financial viability of continuing their commitment. (most recently the University of London Institute of Education which, until receiving a significant additional financial allocation of approximately £3m from the government, questioned whether it should continue to provide ITET). Should the proposal to fund schools directly result in a reallocation of the existing resource then the probability of HEIs continuing as the major providers of teachers would be unlikely and the existing model would become untenable.

When questioning the legislative requirements for ITET courses, the issue of 'choice' must be examined. Under current requirements, HEIs offering ITET programmes must work in partnership with schools but it is not a requirement for schools to work in partnership with HEIs. While it is recognized that the arguments for and against the adoption of a position which requires schools to work in partnership for the delivery of ITET evoke emotive responses from all sectors of education, the fact remains that the onus is still upon providers to secure partnerships with schools. Such a position does little to address the concerns of providers when schools may withdraw from agreements because of staff changes, inspection demands and other reasons, leaving the HEI to count the costs of training, documentation and revised placement allocations. The perpetuation of a system which requires one partner to comply with legislative requirements and confers on the other the right to opt in or not is unlikely to encourage the effective development of 'equal partnership' and should receive due consideration in any period of consultation.

*Trends in England*

As Wales moves towards the revision of Welsh Office Circular 13/98 (Welsh Office, 1998), for implementation in September 2004, it is appropriate to

consider the recent experience of review in England. Certainly, the consultation process in England, for the revision of Circular 4/98 (DfEE, 1998), was extensive, and sought the views of all parties with an interest in teacher education and training, but did not necessarily attend to the issues highlighted by the research studies. Therefore, the new requirements for England, detailed in 'Qualifying to Teach' (DfES/TTA, 2002), ignore many of the concerns expressed by the participants in partnership (Bassett, 2002). As yet the Welsh Assembly Government, has not revealed details which will form the basis of the consultation. An initial consultation document (Welsh Assembly Government 2003), of what will be a two-phase process, has been produced to seek the views of providers. This consultation document does not provide details but indicates a desire to achieve a unity with the English requirements detailed in 'Qualifying to Teach'.

We also propose to proceed on the basis that the Standards for QTS, the Requirements for the provision of ITT and the non-statutory handbook will – with changes where needed to accommodate language and other specific Wales only issues – look very similar to those already issued by the Department for Education and Skills and the Teacher Training Agency in England. (p. 4)

The Teacher Training Agency (TTA) has, however, introduced a number of initiatives to support providers in their development of the school-based, student-teacher experience. They have provided a network of partnership project managers (PPMs) who operate across each 'region' for the promotion and dissemination of good practice. These PPMs have a remit to support HEIs and schools and to co-ordinate activities that encourage co-operation and collaboration between providers. Moreover, the TTA has provided funding for a number of advanced skills teachers (ASTs) to work with providers in promoting partnership by encouraging schools to be more active in their engagement with providers, delivering mentor training to school-based staff and working with student-teachers in both their HEI and school. Additionally, England now benefits from a further initiative, the training schools, whose remit is to provide school experience for groups of trainee teachers and to support the ITET providers in promoting the partnership model for ITET. These support structures are not, at present, available to either schools or HEIs in Wales. Wales may decide that these initiatives are unsuitable for the needs of the Principality but the fact remains that the level of funding made available to enable these schemes is also absent from the Welsh sector and no indication of additional funding has been given.

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*Conclusion*

For those with an interest in the preparation, education and training of teachers in Wales, the time has come to address the issues that restrain the current system and to consider the nature of the 'partnership model with schools' that will best serve the country. How should the National Assembly Government organize the second phase of consultation that will attend to the details of the revision of Circular 13/98? Who should participate in the design of the new requirements? What are the 'key' elements that should be introduced within the new requirements to ensure that the partnership model for ITET develops for the benefit of the profession and, ultimately, the pupils? Are we satisfied with the 'HEI-led partnership' model? What are the distinctive features that must be included to reflect the needs of Wales or is it acceptable to adopt the English requirements? What are the likely consequences if Wales develops a programme of ITET that differs substantially from that of England?

It is essential that the higher education sector makes clear its 'model' for ITET and partnership, and engages fully in and promotes the debate which will establish the future requirements for the education and initial training of teachers. Interestingly, Wales has already introduced a new framework for the inspection of ITET and a set of induction standards for newly qualified teachers, all before the requirements and standards for ITET have been debated or agreed. Hopefully, it will be possible to avoid confusion and overlap and to establish, through consultation, a structure which does not fall foul of the rule 'jam tomorrow and jam yesterday – but never jam today' (Lewis Carroll, *Alice Through the Looking Glass*).

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