Mandated partnership in Initial Teacher Education: experiences and perceptions of teacher educators in Wales

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ABSTRACT

Ambiguity about what a partnership model in initial teacher education (ITE) means in practice for those implementing it in schools and universities remains, despite more than two decades of international research about partnership models. Located in the context of ongoing and significant reform within the education system in Wales including systemic change in ITE, this paper reports the second phase of a three-phase project exploring the perceptions and experiences of individuals working as teacher educators across one university-school partnership. Specifically, this paper explores participants' perceptions and experiences of 'partnership working' and 'joint responsibility', both requirements of the mandated partnership model for ITE provision across Wales. Using relational agency – the ability to collaborate effectively to address complex challenges (Edwards, 2009) as a lens, analysis of data generated from an online survey of teacher educators from one ITE partnership in Wales indicates that there are micro-level examples of what partnership working may achieve. That is, the bringing together of resources – different knowledges that are negotiated through seeking and appreciating the motive orientation of the other, in the service of the development of ITE students' knowledge, skills and practice. We argue that the vision for partnership working and joint responsibility in ITE in Wales requires that relational agency is evident throughout accredited ITE programmes.

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Introduction

Numerous ITE partnership models have been established in different countries and claims are often made about the opportunities for university/school collaborative ITE models to enable student teachers and all partners involved to benefit from each other's knowledge, expertise and experiences. However, 'their implementation has often been superficial and temporary' (Zeichner, 2024: 12) limiting genuine collaboration. Universities often remain the instigators of the model development and predominantly take the lead in decision-making during its implementation. Where university hegemony persists, it risks compromising the development of collaborative ITE partnerships with schools. Tensions between universities and schools can be further exacerbated when partnership models are policy-driven as part of major educational reforms. Zeichner (2024) argues that it is time to admit many ITE partnerships have not worked and new thinking about partnership structures and approaches is needed to enable genuinely collaborative and mutually beneficial relationships to be developed.

Given the continuing emphasis on ITE partnerships (Green and Eady, 2024), our research examines the developing partnership between one university and eighteen schools that are collectively providing teacher education following a period of intense education reform across Wales. We suggest that this detailed focus on the development of one specific ITE partnership over a period of four years offers an opportunity to consider carefully what it means to create and sustain such professional relationships over time. We recognise that any partnership will enact their ITE programmes differently, however, by offering detailed consideration of one partnership across our three phases of research we intend to make visible new thinking (Zeichner, 2024) relevant for all those working within the sphere of partnership ITE provision. Phase 1 data were generated from face-to-face discussion groups at the start of the new partnership model. From our findings, we identified relationships between the perceptions and experiences of agency of individuals working as teacher educators across the university-school partnership and the emotional demand felt by some staff during the change process

(see Livingston and Waters-Davies, 2024). We concur with Hokka et al.'s, (2017: 165) understanding of emotions 'as situational and dynamic responses to the events, entities, persons, and social situations encountered in the workplace'. We found the mandated nature of partnership creation, resulting from a Welsh Government policy directive (2018), associated with the fast pace required, meant that agency was not afforded to teacher educators in the university to the same extent as those in schools. This situation led to markedly different experiences of emotional demand for these groups, with teacher educators in university reporting more challenging emotional demand than those in schools. From these Phase 1 findings we expressed an urgent need to understand more about how partnerships can be better negotiated during the early stages of development. In particular, how relationships can be developed and sustained in ways that enrich teacher education and reduce the anxiety and negative emotional demand that can distract attention and energy from the aims of a partnership model.

Building from Phase 1, in this paper we focus on Phase 2 of our research. Our aim was finding out more about the perceptions and experiences of 'partnership' and university/school 'joint responsibility' for ITE. Our Phase 2 research began eighteen months into the enactment of mandated partnership working in ITE. Data were gathered via an online survey in the same university and schools in Wales that were involved in Phase 1.

Research Context

The Welsh Government holds devolved responsibility for education in Wales[1], this includes responsibility for the preparation of those entering the teaching profession through Initial Teacher Education (ITE). Following advice from the OECD (2014) to reconsider Wales's education strategy to ensure future fitness of the system, the Curriculum for Wales (CfW) was developed. Central to this reform is a transition from a content-driven curriculum model to a learner-led, progression-focused

1 In 1998 the United Kingdom Parliament passed the Government of Wales Act, providing the legal basis for a National Assembly for Wales. The Act granted the National Assembly the power to make secondary legislation in specified areas, with education being one such area. (https://senedd.wales/how-we-work/history-of-devolution/)

approach (Welsh Government, n.d.) that offers non-prescriptive autonomy to teachers to generate localised curricula relevant for their learners (Donaldson, 2015). Alongside such significant changes to curriculum and the professional role of the teacher, the approach to ITE in Wales has altered to reflect a move from university-led provision in which schools were co-opted to host ITE students' practicum experiences to a *partnership approach* in which universities and schools work together to design, implement and *own* ITE programmes.

Since 2019 ITE programmes offered in Wales have been accredited by the Education Workforce Council (EWC) through the ITE Accreditation Board, according to criteria established by the Welsh Government. At the time of our Phase 2 data collection, ITE programmes were accredited according to criteria set out in 2018 (Welsh Government, 2018). Aligned to the major education policy reform process in Wales, the revised processes for the accreditation of ITE programmes, set out clear requirements for 'fundamental change' (Welsh Government, 2018, 2) from previous models of working. This change involved:

1. An increased role for schools;
2. A clearer role for universities;
3. Joint ownership of the ITE programme;
4. Structured opportunities to link school and university learning; and
5. The centrality of research.
   (Welsh Government, 2018: 2)

These reforms positioned ITE as a driver for 'an improvement in educational performance in schools' (Welsh Government, 2018: 2). For more detail about the ITE policy reform process and outcomes see Livingston and Waters-Davies (2024); Glover et al. (2023); Evans (2021); Mutton and Burn (2020).

In Phase 2 of our research, we were particularly interested in the experiences of those working in the university/school ITE partnership in relation to criterion 3 – 'joint ownership of the ITE programme'. The criteria for the accreditation of ITE programmes included a definition of partnership which evoked equality between the partners:

> The partnership model of initial teacher education represents a formal arrangement between HEIs [higher education institutions] and lead partnership schools, underpinned by a

> Memorandum of Understanding, whereby they agree to work collaboratively, **as equal partners** (our emphasis), in designing and facilitating the programme of initial teacher education. (Welsh Government, 2018: 30).

The accreditation criteria also detailed expectations for 'joint ownership', stating,

> Only if universities and a representative group of schools ('lead partnership schools') jointly engage in planning the programme as a whole will it have the coherence that is needed. Establishing collaborative programme planning procedures will require a sense **of joint 'ownership'** (our emphasis) of programmes (Welsh Government, 2018: 11).

Accreditation of ITE programmes in Wales requires not only joint ownership but also joint responsibility and accountability for teacher education – 'If truly collaborative teacher education is to be achieved then "the Partnership" – the HEI together with its lead partner schools – must take **joint responsibility** (our emphasis) for the programme' (Welsh Government, 2018: 11).

ITE Partnership and Relational Agency

Wales is not alone in striving to develop an ITE university/school partnership approach. Research demonstrates that building meaningful collaborative partnerships between ITE providers and schools is complex (Hanly and Heinz, 2022). Imbalance in the involvement and relationship between universities and schools can constrain the development of genuine collaborative partnerships and ultimately student teacher development. Often roles and responsibilities are not defined and support for all those involved in the partnership is lacking (Livingston and Waters-Davies, 2024). Embedded organisational structures, based on different operating requirements and agendas, can also inhibit closer relationships between universities and schools (Hanly and Heinz, 2022; Farrell, 2023; Livingston and Waters-Davies, 2024). Such constraints can hinder ownership and agency in the development of ITE. Rainio (2008: 116) argues that agency is not 'a stable property or an attitude of an individual', rather she emphasises, it is a contradictory process which evolves over time and is shaped in local interactions, to the roles and positions available. In the mandated model in Wales, the requirement is that university and school staff work in partnership within and across their different contexts, roles and responsibilities to improve teacher education. This requires,

and is dependent on, relational work if the ambitious aim of joint ownership and responsibility of ITE is to be realised. Individual agency working in isolation of others is insufficient. Joint action requires relational agency. We acknowledge there is no shortage of research on agency. However, in this paper we specifically focus on relational agency and chose to draw on Edwards's (2005; 2007; 2009; 2012) extensive work on the conceptualisation of relational agency to assist us in our analysis of data in Phase 2. Her work provides conceptual starting points, utilised by many researchers to investigate joint working to address complex professional and practical problems (e.g. Edwards, 2017). Her description of relational agency as 'a capacity for working with others to strengthen purposeful responses to complex problems' (Edwards, 2009: 39) aligns with our research focus on the development of joint responsibility of ITE. Edwards (2007: 6) suggests that relational agency is an 'important move in the development of meshes of mutual responsibility' and explains that this capacity has features that include the ability to work in systems that are not fixed but are themselves in flux or transforming. The provision of ITE is a complex process with many moving parts and influences, exacerbated in times of policy revision and renewal.

Within a context such as ITE providers in Wales are currently experiencing, it can be argued that the broadly fixed common intention – supporting ITE students to become effective teachers – is itself fluid, since the conceptualisation of effective teaching is in flux, due to reorientation of the curriculum, and indeed the role of the teacher within it. Working in partnership and understanding each other's motives then becomes about negotiating understanding around a fluid, and shared conceptualisation of the values, approaches and content of teacher education in a complex changing world. Edwards (2012: 30) suggests, 'inter-professional collaborations worked best when practitioners could understand what was important for others when they encountered a problem'. This involves understanding each other's knowledge, motives, and constraints to create coherent learning experiences in ITE.

A critical question is where such work might take place within an ITE partnership, and how this can be an ongoing and progressive process that enables and supports joint ownership and responsibility. In this paper, drawing from our Phase 2 findings, we highlight the complexity of relationships and interactions in the development of the ITE partnership in Wales, particularly relational agency and its role in joint ownership and joint responsibility.

Methodology and methods

The project adopts a social constructivist stance. We investigate 'social conventions, perception and knowledge in everyday life' (Flick, 2014: 76) within the sphere of interest, i.e. the perceptions and experiences of staff working in an ITE partnership in Wales. Specifically, our research questions (RQ) in Phase 2 asked participants about their perceptions and experiences of:

RQ1. their professional roles and responsibilities during a period of culture change?
RQ2. how changes in professional roles and responsibilities are negotiated?
RQ3. partnership working and joint responsibility?

In this paper, we specifically focus on RQ3, drawing on the findings of the Phase 2 data collection, which took place during the second year of provision of the new four-year accredited ITE partnership model in academic year 2020–2021. This included one-year post-graduate Primary and Secondary PGCE and three-year undergraduate Primary BA programmes offered through the medium of Welsh and English. Data collection in this phase coincided with the COVID-19 pandemic and had to comply with restrictions that were imposed by the government to lessen contact between individuals and groups. Therefore, instead of the original plan of face-to-face facilitated focus groups an alternative online method was selected that would cause the least inconvenience to the participants during the pandemic. Participants could undertake the research voluntarily at a time of their choosing and could withdraw without giving any reason. The data were collected through an online questionnaire from the teacher educators in the university and partner schools. In the questionnaire, we specifically sought experiences and perceptions of partnership working, and the associated requirement, according to the accreditation criteria, 'joint responsibility'. The questionnaire was designed with consideration of what was manageable for respondents, as well as inviting responses that would provide insight into their everyday perspectives and experiences. A link to the questionnaire was made available, in Welsh and English, via an email from the partnership's administrative office, to university and school-based teacher educators who were directly involved in provision of ITE programmes in the same accredited ITE partnership in Wales as Phase 1 (involving

one university and eighteen schools). Participation was anonymous with no mechanism to identify which individuals had responded to the survey. Such anonymity was a purposeful decision intended to support candid responses from participants. Ethical approval was gained from both authors' university ethical approval panels[2] and followed BERA (2018) guidelines.

The questionnaire sought to capture the entry-point into working in the ITE partnership of the range of respondents involved in our study, as well as their lived experience of the partnership. We knew that some in the potential pool of respondents would have entered ITE before, during or after the re-accreditation process. The questionnaire, hosted on Qualtrics® software, included closed and open-ended questions and was designed to allow us to disaggregate responses according to how long respondents had been in post, and also whether they were university-based or school-based teacher educators. In our reporting, where we could detail the numbers of specific responses without compromising anonymity we have done so, otherwise we have used terms such as 'a few' or 'some' to protect participant identity.

The data reported, relevant to RQ3, were analysed using a reflexive thematic approach (Braun and Clarke, 2019; 2022) to construct themes during analysis of respondents' perceptions and experiences of partnership working and joint responsibility. Positioned within a social constructivist approach, this study is an example of Big Q, non-positivist qualitative research (Braun and Clarke, 2023), and as such we embrace researcher subjectivity and view coding and thematic analysis as 'an inherently interpretative practice' (Braun and Clarke, 2023: 2) infused with our subjectivity. We set out below our approach to analysis and how we engaged reflexively to acknowledge how our professional and personal histories shaped the analysis. This is intended to support the trustworthiness of our findings, that is, the extent to which this research is 'worth paying attention to' (Lincoln and Guba, 1985: 290). We acknowledge the dual interpretation that has occurred: that of the respondents as they set out their interpretation of their experiences of partnership working and joint responsibility; and ours in our analysis.

Our data analysis process had four broad stages. Initially, we created a cleaned copy of the report from Qualtrics® by removing extraneous information and

2 Ethical approval number for UWTSD is EC292; Ethical approval number University of Glasgow is 40020009.

anonymising any identifiers that respondents had inserted in their written responses. We familiarised ourselves with the data noting initial impressions and recurring patterns while being conscious of our reflexive position (Hole, 2024). Next, we openly coded the data individually, using the research questions and the aim of the study as a lens: perceptions and experiences of 'partnership' and university/school 'joint responsibility' for ITE. Individually we iterated between data and coding until we felt we had exhausted this process as individuals. This stage reflected what Braun and Clarke (2019) refer to as 'the researcher's reflective and thoughtful engagement with their data and their reflexive and thoughtful engagement with the analytic process' (594). In the third stage of our process, we shared our individual coding with each other, and over a series of dialogic encounters, oscillating between our coding and the data, we agreed upon three themes that we identified were key to understanding what the respondents were telling us about their experiences of partnership and joint responsibility. As explained by Byrne (2022: 1393) if analysis involves more than one researcher, 'the approach should be collaborative and reflexive, aiming to achieve richer interpretations of meaning, rather than attempting to achieve consensus of meaning'. The final stage of analysis of the data was considered again by both authors in dialogue. We also considered how best to report our findings and ensure we gave voice to all our respondents. Our approach embraces reflexivity, subjectivity and creativity as assets in knowledge production (Braun and Clarke, 2019; Byrne, 2022). We present our interpretation of the dataset, shaped by consistent attention to the data, considered analysis and careful discussion, and our own subjectivities.

The authors have worked as academics involved ITE provision within different nations in the UK for over one decade and over three decades respectively. This involvement has ranged from being university-based tutors as part of ITE programmes, leaders of ITE, researchers into ITE provision, to being contributors to policymaking in ITE. As such we read the data from a perspective of knowing the field, practically and academically, and understanding many of its complexities; we intentionally brought our sense of knowing to our coding of the data during analysis. We systematically returned to the data regularly to check whether our developing interpretations remained rooted in participant responses. Such rigour enables us to offer our interpretation of the participants' perceptions and experiences regarding partnership and joint responsibility.

Findings

The respondents ranged from those employed prior to and during the re-accreditation of ITE programmes and those appointed since the changes in ITE provision. English and Welsh responses were aggregated into a single dataset for analysis after Welsh responses had been translated to English. Half of the twenty-eight respondents in total who started the online questionnaire did not go beyond the first two closed questions about role and length of time in ITE (see Tables 1 and 2). Consequently, there were fourteen responses from participants who completed the whole questionnaire, comprising university and school-based staff. While this response rate was disappointing, it was important to be able to gather the participants' views during Phase 2. As this phase of data collection occurred during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, when research of any kind was significantly curtailed, it is not surprising that the number of participants who completed the whole questionnaire was low. Given the severe restrictions and our respect for all those who engaged with our research during this difficult period we chose to include in our analysis the responses of the further fourteen participants who started the questionnaire, answering some questions, but did not complete it. Their responses are provided for the questions they answered. We recognise that the data in this phase of the study reflects the context in which it was generated. While there could be many reasons for the low number of respondents, it could be attributed to the numerous additional challenges that educators in universities and schools had to deal with during the COVID-19 pandemic. Respondents were asked to reflect upon their experiences of working in the previous 1–2 years in the partnership so their responses are likely to have been shaped to some extent by the experience of provision for ITE during the pandemic. That said, only two participants referred directly to the pandemic in their responses, both anticipating that the pandemic may influence their roles and responsibilities in the near future. No mention of the pandemic was made by respondents in relation to the constructs under exploration here: partnership working and joint responsibility. It may be, as found by Kidd and Murray (2020) in their review of ITE provision in England during the pandemic, that '[d]espite the relocation to newly-formed online spaces, many principles and "intentionalities" of practice remained unchanged, as did the teacher educators' orientating values' (542). Nevertheless, it is necessary to note that the data collected represents participants' reflection on a time when the ITE partnership was working under COVID-19 restrictions. These restrictions meant that

for fourteen months prior to data collection ITE provision had been interrupted and the partnership had delivered ITE programmes through a mix of online, and face-to-face provision with limited physical access of university-based staff into schools, and reduced requirements for ITE students to undertake school-based learning, according to criteria set out by Welsh Government (Welsh Government, 2022). It is with great respect for the professionals involved in ITE during such challenging times that we report and discuss our findings.

We begin by presenting the range of roles represented in the completed responses (Table 1) as well as a range of time working in ITE (see Table 2). Brief descriptions of the roles listed in the questionnaire can be found in appendix 1 for completeness.

As a result of our analysis of the written responses of the fourteen participants who completed the open questions, we identified three themes to describe respondents' reported perceptions and experiences of partnership working and joint responsibility:

1. Partnership experienced as confusion, loss or anxiety
2. Partnership perceived as hierarchical
3. Partnership working perceived and experienced as joint activity

Table 1: Number of responses by role in ITE

Role descriptor (SB=school based/ UB=university-based) (The respondents selected one role from a drop-down menu	*Number who started the questionnaire and answered Q1 and Q2*	*Number who completed the questionnaire*
Class mentor (SB)	2	2
Subject mentor (SB)	0	0
Senior mentor (SB)	8	2
Other school-based ITE role (SB)	6	3
ITE academic tutor (UB)	6	4
ITE professional tutor (UB)	2	0
ITE leadership in university (UB)	3	3
Other university-based ITE role (UB)	1	0
Total (n)	28	14

Table 2: Respondent number with role and when joined the ITE partnership

Respondent number	*Role (SB=school based/ UB=university-based)*	*When joined the ITE partnership*
1	Class mentor SB	Before 2018–19
2	ITE leadership in university UB	Before 2018–19
3	ITE academic tutor UB	Before 2018–19
4	ITE academic tutor UB	Before 2018–19
5	ITE leadership in university UB	Before 2018–19
6	ITE leadership in university UB	Before 2018–19
7	Other school-based ITE role SB (Network lead)	During 2018–19
8	Senior mentor SB	During 2018–19
9	ITE academic tutor UB	During 2019–20
10	Other school-based ITE role SB (Network lead)	During 2019–20
11	ITE academic tutor UB	Before 2018–19
12	Other school-based ITE role SB (Network lead)	During 2018–19
13	Class mentor SB	Since 2020
14	Senior mentor SB	Since 2020

Below we set out the themes using examples from the dataset to illustrate them.

1. Partnership experienced as confusion or loss

A third of respondents described administrative and communication challenges across the partnership in a way that suggested lack of clarity or confusion, e.g. about who is responsible for responding to (student and staff) queries.

> Challenges are ineffective and timely communication to the right people, and the fact that in reality edges can blur, leading to a lack of clarity for both staff and students as to the 'correct' person for a particular question. (Respondent 4)

> The challenges I have faced are not many but are mostly linked to being able to communicate effectively with the other schools in my network and to ensure consistency across the network is being achieved. (Respondent 7)

Three university-based respondents noted the disconnect they felt between university and school provision because they were not visiting schools as much as they did previously due to changes in role responsibility; this was experienced as a loss compared to the previous ITE model.

> However, academic lecturers do not have any opportunity to see students actually teaching anymore, so it is difficult to know if the content of your lectures have any impact in a practical, classroom sense. This would seem to be a challenge of the current programmes for many staff. (Respondent 5)
>
> The cost of these changes has been a loss of connection with school experience and school-based subject colleagues, although this is an area which has been identified as needing additional development in coming years. (Respondent 2)
>
> … opportunities to maintain contact with schools has been limited … in my opinion, [this] is a shame and my concern is that it will ultimately de-skill [staff]. (Respondent 6)

While respondents indicated their broad role within the partnership as one of seven listed in a drop-down menu (as in Table 1), there appeared to be little common language used across the respondent group to describe their responsibilities. Each respondent used a different form of words to describe their responsibilities within the ITE partnership, and even when they had selected the same broad role descriptor in the drop-down menu, the responses about the responsibilities of that role in the open question section varied widely. We sought clarification about role descriptors and responsibilities from the then Head of ITE and noted that 3 out of 14 respondents used terms/role titles that were not recognised by the Head of ITE to describe their responsibilities or identify formal roles in the ITE partnership. While the drop-down menu only enabled the respondents to select one role, in the open question responses about responsibilities many identified more than one role and, in some cases, up to four roles and the responsibilities associated with them. Other respondents described what they did rather than set out their responsibilities. This lack of clarity about responsibilities across the range of respondents which appeared to contribute to experiences and perceptions of confusion contributed to the identification of Theme 1.

The responses from two of the university-based teacher educators indicated a loss of comfort compared to their past role(s) and responsibilities due to the

requirements within university-based ITE provision that they (i) provide general lectures to the cohort across a range of content, and (ii) are responsible for the theoretical input into 'Bridging' events.[3]

> I now need to know theory/information that is outside my day-to-day teaching content, so this knowledge is different to what I needed to know previously. Some of this content continues to be outside of my comfort-zone as there is never enough time to read enough about the topics covered to be properly comfortable about it. (Respondent 5)
>
> Knowledge of a wider range of theory-based content – I have had to take on the challenge of delivering unfamiliar content (as have all ITE tutors). (Respondent 6)

In summary, for six of the seven respondents who were appointed before re-accreditation, partnership working was experienced as a sense of loss, a lack of clarity about responsibility for some activities and/or lines of communication and some concern about lack of knowledge for new expectations for programme content. For three of the remaining respondents, partnership working was experienced as involving complex or confused lines of communication. The lack of clarity about responsibilities was evident across the whole respondent group.

2. Partnership perceived as hierarchical

A third of respondents reported some kind of hierarchy within the partnership; this was manifest in perceptions and experiences of those who were new to the teacher educator team, as well as those who had been in post prior to the new programmes. The responses from two school-based staff indicated that the university staff members tend to lead in offering support for decision-making and advice.

> They are able to support me with decision making and answer any queries I may have. (Respondent 7)
>
> [My role is] Ensuring I've interpreted what I need to interpret accurately to enable me to pass messages, learning and training on. … I ensure all our partner schools are up to date with key information from the University. (Respondent 10)

3 Bridging events are activities where university and school-based teacher educators come together to plan and implement learning experiences which explicitly introduce a theoretical concept to ITE students and explore how this is played out in practice in schools (e.g. scaffolded learning, assessment for learning)

The responses above appear to suggest that these two school-based staff still saw their role as implementing what the university proposed or has put in place. It is not clear if the two respondents sought support and advice from the university staff or if it was the role that the university staff took up. Nevertheless, the responses appear to indicate a continuing dependency on university staff transmitting information to school staff, rather than engaging in reciprocal actions that enable two-way exchange of expertise to develop the object. Two university-based staff also reflected in their responses the perception that the university still has overall responsibility for the students and a role particularly in relation to quality of the student experience.

> There are some areas that will require further refinement, especially school-based input into the review and creation of modules … and the engagement of partnership schools to address issues of consistency and fairness in student experience. (Respondent 2)

> I think changes have made [university-based] ITE staff's responsibility towards students harder to fulfil, particularly when students are on placement. Now there are fewer staff responsible for more students (Respondent 3)

However, one university-based staff member had a different perception, indicating that partnership working involved the university seeking 'approval' for developments from school-based colleagues:

> There are some things that university staff have a far better knowledge of than school staff would (due to the nature of the two jobs), but every decision/idea seems to have to be 'approved' by school-based colleagues before it can be implemented (Respondent 5)

This response suggests the notion that the university leads the provision of ITE persists for some working within the partnership, but not all.

3. Partnership working perceived and experienced as joint activity

The majority of respondents reported experiencing partnership as the sharing of activity within ITE provision and some responsibility for it. 'Bridging' events were recognised by 8 of the 14 respondents as the locus of partnership working.

> The positive shift has been the strengthening of the relationship with a smaller number of key staff, and especially with the network lead in the network I am linked to for bridging. (Respondent 2)

> I think working in partnership is beneficial to students, schools and ITE staff. I don't think we exploit the possibilities of the partnerships enough. From my perspective … I feel that we could develop more practical bridging activities. (Respondent 3)

> Experience [in] bridging has been more positive than my previous experience of this two years ago - it feels like the relationship has shifted from HEI colleagues turning up and 'doing our bit' to a genuinely collaboratively planned activity. (Respondent 4)

> [Bridging] between the university and the networks - both sides benefit and support each other. (Respondent 11)

> The most successful aspects of this for me are having close contact … in order to support the delivery of Bridging content and teaching placements; being involved in decision making; myself and the students having a better understanding of how the module content links to actual school experiences and the students feeling they are part of a team. (Respondent 7)

In addition to the shared activity of 'bridging', school-based respondents indicated development of some experiences of joint ownership for teacher education and joint responsibility for student teacher progress through partnership activities. This development also appears to be recognised by a few university-based staff.

> I have really enjoyed this partnership programme. I enjoy talking to mentors and observing some of our students growing in confidence and professionalism through their time with us. I feel a real sense of responsibility that we need to support our students to become the best teachers they can be and to challenge them through their journey. (Respondent 10)

> I have built up good relationships with [staff] allocated to my network. There have been opportunities for us to collaborate on the delivery of content and experiences for the students. (Respondent 7)

> Schools now have more responsibility, I believe that some are more pro-active in ensuring that students succeed, i.e. by giving better support. Years ago, it would have been up to the university tutor to sort out problems, but schools seem to have taken on some of this responsibility. (Respondent 5)

Respondents report experiencing joint responsibility as sharing the responsibilities for student teachers, specifically, sharing activities such as planning and student support and sharing information.

> Successes, anecdotally, come from greater sharing of information and a feeling of a 'team around the student teacher'. (Respondent 4)

> Joint responsibility means that the theory they need to support teaching and learning is carried out in practice in the schools. That University and schools have a shared role in students developing into teachers, in helping them along their journey. (Respondent 10)
>
> Before the new partnership, I felt that university provision and school-based provision were very separate entities. Now, school-based staff and university-based staff form a team around each student and through good, regular communication are in a far better position to support the students in their development. (Respondent 7)
>
> Shared planning – school and university experience; a smooth route rather than a gap between school and university. (Respondent 11)

For a few respondents, 'partnership' is experienced as shared activity, and for most respondents encapsulated in the shared activity that is known as 'bridging'. This contributed to the identification of Theme 3. However, for a small number of respondents (4 out of 14) there were both experiences and perceptions of collaboration with some signs of teacher educators (university- and school-based) developing relational agency (e.g. discussions and joint decisions about student outcomes).

Discussion

The new mandated model of ITE brought changes to roles and responsibilities for both university- and school-based teacher educators. However, the lack of clarity about roles and responsibilities expressed by participants in our study is a persistent theme in ITE research (Farrell, 2023; Hanly and Heinz, 2022; Livingston and Shiach, 2010). The Phase 2 findings demonstrate that challenges of nomenclature of roles and clearly identified responsibilities stubbornly remain. The reported ambiguity seems to remain as an obstacle to the development of a shared understanding amongst all those involved about role functions and responsibilities. As researchers, we were surprised by the variety and number of roles reported in the participant written responses to the open questions. Alternative or additional roles may have been named by role-holders themselves in an effort to make sense of, or give visibility to, responsibilities that otherwise would not be transparent. We were also aware that in the two years between accreditation and our Phase 2 data collection the staff involved had changed and perhaps embedded past cultural ways of doing things resulted in contextual descriptions of role responsibilities and

localised role titles being passed on from peer-to-peer and acquiring unintended status. Hence our need to seek clarification of the formal roles identified by the Head of ITE. It appears for some participants that previous familiar role titles and/or responsibilities are hard to let go of, perhaps in an effort to maintain the status quo of previous ways of working.

For some university teacher educators, the change of role responsibilities in the design of the new ITE partnership model resulted in what they identified as a loss of an important role responsibility – namely contact with their students when they are teaching in school. While the loss expressed centred around the inability to connect lecture subject content to students' practice in school, concerns relating to de-skilling university staff due to the responsibility changes were also identified. These findings indicate the challenges for participants of transitioning from one role position to another and the feelings of loss of responsibilities relating to connections with students in school. Given participants' expression of care for their students' development, it is evident that the change to responsibilities as a teacher educator, impacted on their professional identity. Sarastuen's (2020) study of identity transition and loss in the context of vocation education, identified the challenge of detaching from particular ways of acting as part of the process of role transitioning. She suggested this involves a person aligning 'where they had been' in terms of their role and its context with 'where they are going'. Sarastuen (2020) argues this transition involves 'dissimilar ways of being' (336) and 'detachment from former identities' (338), as part of the process of forming a new identity. Similar to our study findings, she identified participant feelings of loss, including emotional detachment which occurred when attempting to detach from previous identities and practices. Citing Sfard and Prusak's work (2005) on critical elements of identity, Sarastruen (2020) suggests if these elements of identity change, they 'have the power to create the feelings of having one's whole identity changed' (338). This aligns with the loss of some role responsibilities identified by some university-based teacher educators, as well as feelings of loss of agency in the change process evident in findings in Phases 1 and 2 of our study (see Livingston and Waters-Davies, 2024). There are echoes of the emotional demand expressed by some university teacher educators in our study, when their new role required letting go of some practices, such as supporting their students' development in school. The loss perceived represented for them a loss of opportunity to feel valued by their students.

> the emotional aspect arises because the participants are not merely letting go of distinctive practices; in the act of letting go, they are also leaving the sensations that those practices brought about. (Sarastruen, 2020: 247)

The loss of agency experienced in the context of the new ITE partnership model for some university-based teacher educators appears to relate to a perceived or experienced loss, to some extent, of power and control over their role and responsibilities. For example, involving loss of influence on their students' subject knowledge development during school practice. This may be due to a lack of agency and opportunity for engagement between some university and school staff to develop an understanding of the resources each bring to teacher education (knowledge and expertise) and time to explore how joint responsibility for student teachers' subject knowledge development may be realised.

Eteläpelto et al. (2013, 61) identify 'professional agency' and argue it exists when an individual has the power to exert influence, make choices and bring about some kind of change that effects their work. As evident in our study, the perception or experience of loss of professional agency can impact on the emotional demand on those involved in a change process. Hökkä et al.'s (2017) qualitative meta-synthesis of five empirical studies, focusing on various aspects of emotions and professional agency at work identified satisfaction and enthusiasm when it appeared 'educators gained pleasant experiences related to students' novel learning practices and to the educators' own new roles' (169). However, they identified, exhaustion and anxiety, resulting from 'a lack of the personal and social resources needed to carry out new tasks' and from 'a lack of recognition of work done' (169). They suggest that such negative emotions can hinder collaboration, and as found in our study, can diminish the development of relational agency between teacher educators based in the university and school networks and reduce opportunities to work together towards joint responsibility of teacher education.

Our findings also showed that experiences and perceptions of partnership working varied according to whether the respondent was based in a school or the university. While this may not be surprising, it indicates that 'partnership' is still differentially experienced and perceived by the different partners involved in the mandated ITE partnership. Challenges to the development of joint responsibility and joint ownership as identified in the accreditation criteria set out by the Welsh Government were also expressed by the school-based teacher educators. It appears that even after eighteen months of partnership working there was still

limited understanding of how each of the partners contributes to the shared motive of enhancing the ITE programme for students. Our findings highlight that, for some participants, the hierarchical structure of teacher education remained with the university taking the lead in decision-making. Perceptions of joint responsibility were similarly varied, with some participant responses indicating a hierarchical structure in which the university was still deemed to hold ultimate responsibility for student outcomes was evident. Structural arrangements such as the schools receiving the funding for teacher education from the university and the ultimate decision regarding the award of the student teacher's degree resting with the university serve as indicators that responsibility and accountability for teacher education remains with the university. Hierarchical structural issues were to be expected in the early stages of the new partnership arrangements (as reported in Livingston and Waters-Davies, 2024), as the university had previously held responsibility for teacher education. The university teacher educators had to initiate the identification of school partners and support their initial familiarisation of the legislative requirements of teacher education degree programmes. However, in Phase 2 of our study it appears that a hierarchy of knowledge also still prevails, as our findings show that the knowledge of university staff holds greater authority in some instances for school staff. This suggests an 'unequal power relationship' (Osberg, 2010, iv). This runs counter to the Welsh Government's (2018) policy aim and Furlong's (2015) vision of bringing together and valuing different knowledges. It also suggests that some staff still focus on their roles, responsibilities and actions as individuals working in school or in the university, rather than in relation to each other's knowledge, expertise and experience. This also runs counter to Edwards' (2009, 33) notion of 'distributed expertise' and indicates that a shift towards a university/school partnership involving joint responsibility and ownership in the development of a new concept of ITE has still some way to go. Fundamentally it necessitates clearer understanding of the motive and meaning of joint partnership for each partner. For example, when and how the university and schools work together in an overall joint endeavour of designing the ITE programme and when does each partner potentially hold greater responsibility for part of the programme. This demonstrates that joint ownership of ITE involves bringing together different knowledges at certain times and recognising the importance of the distinct knowledge and expertise that each partner brings at particular times in the ITE programme.

Experiences and perceptions of partnership also appeared to vary according to how long the respondent had been associated with the ITE provision, highlighting the temporal challenges of relationship building. Developing relational agency takes time. While the data were somewhat limited in this regard the university-based respondents reported gain and loss in their experiences of partnership compared to the past, whereas school-based respondents reported only gain. Importantly, the data show a small number of respondents had experiences and perceptions of teacher educators engaging in instances of joint partnership working in the bridging activities. A few respondents referred positively to the specific joint bridging activities, in which some, but not all, university- and school-based staff are required to implement a co-constructed set of experiences for ITE students in which theoretical and practical knowledges are explored in praxis. Respondents referred to this being an example of partnership working, as well as a site for their own professional learning. The bridging activities provided an opportunity for some university and school staff to come together and share their distinct knowledges and expertise to form something new within the ITE programme. Such activities indicate that there are *seeds of relational agency* developing within the university/school partnership, particularly for the staff involved in the bridging activities. These university- and school-based staff are responding to the new challenge of jointly expanding the object (the ITE programme) and recognise the shared motive of the partnership endeavour to improve student teacher development. Together they have the opportunity to recognise the resources that each bring and are able to work alongside others on complex problems towards negotiated outcomes (Edwards, 2010). However, not all respondents shared these experiences and perceptions. The partnership currently appears to be perceived and experienced at the level of joint activity. In this way, our Phase 2 findings suggest that the positive signs of the development of relational agency within the ITE programme are mainly limited to joint bridging activities that not all university and school staff are engaged in. We argue that relational agency is the goal of the new partnership arrangements rather than shared activity for some staff.

Conclusions

Feelings of agency and opportunities to engage in agentic action are central in developing joint ownership and joint responsibility. Our data suggests that seeds of

relational agency have been planted through the bridging activities. They provide a foundation from which to build, as they provide 'a set of shared relational ways of being together in activity' (Smith, 2017, 68). However, these seeds need to be nourished, and relational agency extended to the whole ITE partnership beyond the series of joint activities. The development of a new concept of ITE requires university- and school-based staff forging new ways of being and new identities as teacher educators working in partnership with each other. This necessitates detachment from past ways of working, which was identified as emotionally difficult for some staff, particularly the university staff who experienced a loss of agency (see Livingston and Waters-Davies, 2024). This emotional impact of change needs to be recognised and supported if a joint ITE model is to be developed that offers a new and enhanced programme for student teachers. However, all involved need to recognise that such a new model cannot be a continuation of the past. Our findings suggest that habits that drive culture and power relations are not broken despite visible indicators of change within the ITE programme (e.g. increased involvement of school-based teacher educators). The partnership does not appear yet to be at a cultural tipping point. A 'break or "cut" with the past' is required whereby, 'the system *cuts through or out of* its past. It *cuts into* a new space of "being"' (original emphasis, Osberg, 2020, v). Returning to Edwards's (2005) conception of relational agency, this means both university and school staff engaging with one another not only through knowledge exchange and a series of bridging activities. It needs to develop beyond this through the provision of opportunities for each member of staff involved to share their individual motives for, and understandings and interpretations of, partnership working in ITE. It also requires time to engage in joint negotiations with each other that are focused on exploring how their different knowledges, resources and contexts can enhance and transform ITE. Such detailed 'micro-negotiations' (Edwards, 2005: 171) need to reveal individual actions and responsibilities, as well as identifying how they come together with mutual responsibility to the challenges of joint partnership work to enhance ITE. This necessitates individual agency, as well as joint action requiring relational agency. Smith (2017: 73) advances the notion of the relational and interdependent character of agency in his argument that 'It is only together' (i.e. with others and in context) or 'in relation to' that anything happens. In this way, he argues agency may be 'conceptualised as relationship-in-practice – the action and the activity'. He explains,

> relationship is thus dynamic and multifarious as the individual connects with themselves; their macro-, meso- and micro-contexts; and the numerous others who populate them in the immediate, past and future orientations of who they are, have been and are becoming (Smith, 2017: 73)

Such a conceptualisation underscores the complexity of relational agency necessitating activity and action in development of personal agentic capacities and the joint capacities of all involved in building the relationships required for an ITE partnership. This insight responds to Zeichner's call for new thinking (2024) for those working in the sphere of ITE partnership. Our findings show the complex task of developing relational agency to enable joint ownership and responsibility of ITE is entangled in emotions associated with change, discontinuity and loss. Goldsworthy (2005: 175) points out that loss leaves people forever transformed and they have to integrate and make sense of the loss, not only in relation to how they view the world, but also, they view themselves. This is an important reminder to understand the individual within the collective social endeavour of developing a partnership ITE approach. However, as Smith (2017: 86) argues,

> personal agency is more than the enactment of personal properties. It is the negotiated enactment of these properties within the contexts, relationships and purposes that make such properties, and the actions they substantiate, meaningful and consequential.

Our data indicates that bridging activities, in this partnership, are a micro-level example of what partnership working may achieve. That is, the bringing together of resources – different knowledges that are negotiated through seeking and appreciating the motive orientation of the other, in the service of the development of ITE students' knowledge, skills and practice. We argue that the vision in Wales for partnership working and joint responsibility in ITE requires that such relational agency is evident throughout the ITE programme and not simply exemplified in episodic joint activity.

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