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The role of schools within initial teacher education in England: an exploration of the shifting policy focus over the past 50 years

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ABSTRACT

Looking back at the very first issue of the *Journal of Education for Teaching*, it is clear that initial teacher education (ITE) was, at the time, undergoing significant change and has, in fact, been subject to political scrutiny in each of the intervening decades. Our paper traces key policy moments over the past 50 years in England, examining specifically those policies that have had implications for the role of schools and school-based teacher educators within ITE programmes. Our interest is in the broader context that has informed ITE policy-making, the content of those policies, and the implications for the role of schools. We go on to discuss how the concept of ITE partnership working has evolved over this period and then consider the pedagogic role that schools can play in the education of teachers, including the role of school-based mentors. Finally, we consider the potential impact on the practice of the most recent set of ITE reforms in England.

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Initial teacher education; teacher education policy; teacher education reform; teacher education partnerships; school-based teacher education

Introduction

In the editorial that accompanied the first edition of the *British Journal of Teacher Education* (BJTE, the erstwhile name of the *Journal of Education for Teaching*) in 1975, Edgar Stones, the founding editor of the journal, declared that ‘change seems likely to be endemic in teacher education for some time’ (1975, 2). When Stones was writing, teacher education in England and Wales was experiencing almost unprecedented levels of uncertainty. The publication in 1972 of the ‘Report of the Government’s Committee of Inquiry into Teacher Education and Training’ (1972) had caused considerable disquiet (Simon 1975) and much of the journal’s early content was preoccupied with the implications of its proposals to restructure the system and rationalise provision. These included the introduction of a three-cycle model for teacher education, in which a degree or higher education diploma was to be followed by professional preparation (including up to six weeks’ teaching practice) and a supported induction period. The third cycle would provide each teacher with scope for a sabbatical term every seven years, with non-

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graduate teachers able to use that time to undertake a B.Ed. qualification. Thus, teaching was to become an all-graduate profession.

In the event, wider political and economic factors meant that the recommendations of the James Report were never implemented. It has, however, been argued that the proposed changes 'could have begun to make a difference to the quality of teaching and learning in schools that might have headed off some of the attacks on teacher education that characterised the early 1980s' (Taylor 2008, 304–305). Taylor (1987) had, in fact, previously identified the nature of these attacks, which he summarised as perceptions of an insufficiently robust recruitment process, a lack of programme coherence; a lack of programme relevance (particularly in relation to the needs of schools), issues with timing and organisation of periods of school practice, and the lack of teacher involvement in all aspects of programmes, including selection of candidates, teaching the programmes themselves and the assessment of students' practical competence.

The attacks to which Taylor refers endured well beyond the 1980s and were characteristic of critiques, particularly from right-wing think tanks, about the relevance of existing teacher education programmes (see Loughran and Menter 2019, for examples). Such critiques were also hugely influential in terms of the ideas underpinning the significant teacher education reforms that began in England in 2010 under the Coalition government (comprising Conservatives and Liberal Democrats working together). One example can be seen in the Policy Exchange report '*More Good Teachers*' (Freedman, Lipman, and Hargreaves 2008) which explicitly questioned the role of theory in ITE programmes and advocated greater responsibility for schools in their planning and delivery.

Several early papers in BJTE were keen to examine not only the changes to the structure of teacher education in England and Wales proposed in the James Report but also the possible future of teacher education in terms of the role of the university and the training colleges, the relationship between theory and practice, and the nature of different teacher education programmes. All these themes reflected an increasing awareness of the role of schools and partnership working within ITE programmes (see, for example, Hirst 1976; Nias 1977; Porter 1976; Webster 1975). Although the James Report had highlighted the disconnect between student teachers' academic learning and their experience of practice, it had not gone beyond suggesting that the former needed to have greater perceived relevance and that teachers themselves needed to play a greater role in the preparation of new entrants. It is the subsequent development of the concept of ITE partnership working (and particularly the role of schools in ITE) that is the focus of our current paper, which traces the evolution of such approaches over the past 50 years. We write from the position of three experienced teacher educators working within a well-established ITE partnership that prepares secondary school teachers within a range of subjects.

From the James Report onwards, much of the policy discussion around ITE focussed on structural considerations, particularly on the notion of partnership as a contractual relationship between ITE providers and schools, rather than as a pedagogical relationship. It was also during the early 1990s that research was being carried out into the nature of ITE partnerships, most notably the Modes of Teacher Education (MOTE) project (Furlong et al. 1996, 2000) which was intended to inform the policy debate around the effectiveness of different models of ITE. The researchers were able to identify three predominant models, each of which is characterised by the particular role that the school plays in relation to

higher education: collaborative partnerships, based on shared responsibility for the planning and delivery of the ITE programme; HEI (Higher Education Institution, or university) led partnerships; and separatist (or complementary) partnerships, in which 'school and HE are seen as having separate and complementary responsibilities but where there is no systematic attempt to bring these two dimensions into dialogue' (Furlong et al. 1996, 47).

In her original identification of the way in which teacher education had come to be seen as a policy problem, Cochran-Smith (2005) noted the risks of failing to consider carefully which aspects of ITE might be better addressed in schools, or at the university, or indeed 'in the intersections of universities, schools, and communities' (2005, 13). Such considerations require careful thought not just about *what* is to be learned, but also about *how* that learning happens, i.e. about the forms of teacher education pedagogy that will best support them. While the notion of partnership working is clearly central to many ITE reforms over recent decades, it is important to examine exactly what is meant by partnership, and how the role of schools and school-based mentors has been understood by those engaged in and researching the process, and not merely by those responsible for policy making.

Brisard, Menter, and Smith (2005), in their systematic literature review undertaken on behalf of the General Teaching Council for Scotland, identified two ways in which the term 'partnership' could be conceptualised:

First, there is the use of the term partnership to carry certain theories about the nature of learning to become a teacher. These theoretical precepts concern the pedagogy and curriculum of ITE. Second, though – and this logically does take second place – there are the uses of the term to describe particular arrangements for the delivery of ITE. These logistical concerns include such matters as the resourcing of initial teacher education, particular balances of responsibility between different roles or the placing of and arrangements for particular forms of school experience. (2005, 5)

While policy makers might be expected to focus on the structural and administrative arrangements of partnership (for example, by determining the number of days that are required for the teaching practicum), it is not unreasonable to suggest that they might also focus on the nature of the ITE curriculum. Both, therefore, might be subject to policy reform.

Teacher education reform is a widespread phenomenon (Darling-Hammond and Lieberman 2012; Kosnik, Beck, and Goodwin 2016), by no means unique to England. Such reform generally draws on a strong narrative around the economic necessity of having 'quality teachers' and, by extension, quality teacher education, see, for example, the individual policy case studies in Mayer (2021) for an understanding as to how ITE reform has played out in individual countries. Nonetheless, particular ITE policy reforms make England something of an outlier, both within the UK nations and internationally (Loughran and Menter 2019). While market-led influences have dictated policies similar to those found elsewhere, such as the drive to recruit more well-qualified teachers through the creation of diverse routes, and the need to produce teachers who are 'classroom ready', what has been noticeable in England has been the aspiration for schools to 'take more control over training the next generation of teachers' (DfE, 2013). What underpinned this aspiration was not necessarily a pedagogical commitment to a particular process by which new entrants could learn effectively about teaching from teachers

themselves (which, we would argue, is to be welcomed), but rather an ideological commitment, evident during much of the past five decades, to weaken what was perceived to be the harmful influence of universities (Whitty 2014). As noted above, this narrative was particularly evident during the 1980s and it resurfaced under the Coalition government, reflected in the remark of Nick Gibb (erstwhile Schools Minister who was later to take up this role again):

Who is to blame for our education system slipping down the international rankings? The answer is the academics in the education faculties of universities. (Gibb 2014)

It is within this context that we begin by identifying key policy moments over the past 50 years which have had direct implications for the role of schools within ITE and then go on, using the lens of partnership as a pedagogic concept, to examine how partnership working has evolved over this period, with a particular focus on the relative power and prominence of schools at any given policy turn. Finally, we consider the pedagogic role that schools can play in the education of teachers and specifically how the role of mentors has been conceived, before looking ahead to what the future may hold.

The role of schools within ITE: 50 years of national policy

Although the only recommendation of the James Report to be implemented was the introduction of an induction year for all newly qualified teachers, the 1970s nevertheless saw significant change to the teacher education landscape, with the closure of many single-purpose colleges of education or their amalgamation into larger bodies. Structural change brought an increasing policy focus on what some saw as the weaknesses of teacher education and the push for more control over the processes and content of programmes is evident in the White Paper *Teaching in Schools: The Context of Initial Training* (DES, 1983) and the publication the following year of Circular 3/84 (DES 1984), which established a new accreditation agency, the Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education (CATE). For the first time, there were to be, for all ITE programmes, national accreditation criteria that covered the selection of students, the qualifications of those teaching on ITE programmes, curriculum content, assessment and final student qualification. CATE's membership represented a range of different stakeholders (such as universities, teacher training providers, local authorities) but, importantly, also included schoolteacher representatives. Circular 3/84 also introduced minimum requirements for the amount of time to be spent by student teachers in school (15 weeks for those on one-year postgraduate programmes), thus emphasising the role of schools and the practicum experience in all teacher education courses, but not offering any consideration of what the nature of the professional learning during the practicum experience might be.

The early 1990s witnessed further significant ITE reform with the publication of Circulars 9/92 and 16/93 (DFE, 1992; DFE 1993), dealing with secondary and primary ITE programmes, respectively. Circular 9/92 set out the expectation that schools would 'exercise a joint responsibility for the planning and management of courses and the selection, training and assessment of students' (DFE, 1992, para. 14). The proportion of time to be spent in school was set at a minimum of 60%. Teacher education providers were also required to establish contractual arrangements for partnership, including necessary funding agreements. Delivery of the new programmes was to begin in 1994,

with quality of provision assessed by visits from Her Majesty's Inspectorate (HMI). At the same time, the government set up the Teacher Training Agency (TTA) as an 'arms-length' body to oversee both the funding of ITE and the allocation of places and to become the new sector accreditation body (supplanting CATE). The agency was set up in order to deliver specifically on two government priorities: the recruitment and retention of teachers and the quality of ITE. It was the TTA that was responsible for setting up the National Partnership Project (see Furlong et al. 2006), which ran between 2001 and 2005, intended to increase the capacity for, and quality of, ITE in schools. The project was organised around regional groups, each of which comprised a range of interested stakeholders (Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), Local Authorities, schools, etc.).

In addition to legislation shaping the way in which ITE providers should work in partnership with schools, there was a move to develop alternative routes to qualification without any university element. In 1993, a new initiative, School Centred Initial Teacher Training (SCITT), was established. Although this initially catered for very small numbers, it grew in capacity during the 1990s and early 2000s before becoming a significant form of provision after 2010. Another school-based route, the Graduate Teacher Programme, was set up in 1997, primarily to provide a means of entry for career-changers. Teach First appeared in England in 2002, working predominantly with London schools. Teach First was based on the model of Teach for America, established in 1990, which was the precursor of the Teach for All movement, now adopted by many countries across the globe (Thomas, Rauschenberger, and Crawford-Garrett 2020).

The arrival of the Coalition Government in 2010 brought another wave of significant reforms, leading to a further reconceptualisation of the role of schools in ITE, or initial teacher training (ITT) to use the government's preferred term.¹ Following the publication of *The Importance of Teaching: the Schools' White Paper* (DfE 2010) and a subsequent ITT implementation plan (DfE, 2011), there was a clear policy drive towards greater involvement of schools, mainly through the establishment of the 'School Direct' scheme and a rapid expansion of the number of SCITT providers. Such a provision was designated as 'school-led', with a stated policy aim to ensure that at least 50% of 'training' places would be allocated to school-led providers by 2015. The government's rationale for setting up 'School Direct' was to enable schools to select and recruit their own trainees and to agree the content and focus of the training programme depending on the needs of both the trainees and the school (DfE, 2014a).

The past decade in England (2014–2024) has seen not only the above reforms becoming embedded but also a significant shift in policy focus from securing first a greater school involvement in ITE, to then ensuring the quality and consistency of school-based mentoring, as signalled in the introduction of a set of national standards for school-based ITT mentors (DfE, 2016b). This was a key recommendation made by the Carter Review of ITT, commissioned to identify potential improvements to ITT across the sector (Carter 2015), and has been prominent within the government response to the ITT Market Review report (DfE, 2021), in which specific requirements for the time allocated to mentor training were prescribed for the first time. The ITT Market Review itself was set up by the government in 2019 to address one aspect of its wider Recruitment and Retention Strategy (DfE, 2019), but its report was more wide-reaching and led to the requirement for all ITT providers (both university-led and school-led) to secure accreditation from the government in relation to a new set of criteria for any programmes offered from

September 2024 onwards. One of the key features of these new criteria was a requirement for all accredited programmes to follow a Core Content Framework (CCF) (DfE, 2016a), with detailed specification as to how this content was to be reflected in both provider-based and school-based curriculum delivery.

The role of schools within ITE: policy analysis

In examining this rise to prominence of schools within ITE policy and the changes it has brought to the balance of power, we draw on Brisard, Menter, and Smith's (2005) conceptualisation of partnership as either a theoretical precept concerning ITE pedagogy and the curriculum or as reflecting merely administrative arrangements and logistical concerns. We track the way that various policy initiatives have moved from a focus on the latter to increasing interest in the former. When exploring the role of schools in ITE and how this role has been shaped by teacher education policies, it is essential to acknowledge key policy initiatives related to other aspects of schools and schooling, which impacted on the context in, and for which, teachers were being prepared. We have summarised the key changes in both areas in Table 1, alongside the wider political shifts that framed the macro-context. We have attempted to include in our analysis all significant policies related to the involvement of schools in the ITE over the past 50 years, as well as the key policies affecting ITE provision more broadly.

Our analysis highlights some key trends that can be discerned over this 50-year period. Initially, the policy focus was less on school involvement and more on the role of higher education, resulting from the rationalisation of provision within universities and polytechnics, and the move towards teaching as a graduate profession. The period from 1974 to 1997 saw increasing moves to regulate teacher education in England; for example, through the setting up of regulatory bodies such as the Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education (CATE) and its successor the Teacher Training Agency (TTA), as well as through the development of criteria, and ultimately standards, to assess teachers' professional competence. At the same time, there was a recognition that critiques of existing provision required a change to the organisation of ITE programmes. It is important to note that these critiques came not only from a number of influential right-wing polemicists (see above) but also from within universities themselves, frustrated by the disconnect between overly theoretical programmes and actual practice in schools (Hagger and McIntyre 2006). Similar debates were taking place elsewhere, such as in the United States, where critical voices were again being raised both within and from outside teacher education (see, Borko, Liston, and Whitcomb (2006) for a summary of these debates). While much of the criticism from external commentators in the US centred on the charge that university ITE programmes were either too theoretical or not theoretical enough, teacher educators themselves were often calling for programme change so as to prepare students adequately for the realities of the schools and communities in which they would ultimately be working (Borko, Liston, and Whitcomb 2006). In England, the driver for reform has invariably been a perceived need to improve quality, although the mechanisms for achieving this have varied from a focus on regulatory control on the one hand (as can be seen in the reforms that took place in the 1980s and those that took place after 2010) to a focus on developing greater partnership integration on the other (for example, the National Partnership Project initiative in the 2000s). What is noticeable is that the



Table 1. Policy relevant to the role of schools in ITE programmes.

Year	Policy	Context	Content	Prominence given to schools	Implications for ITE curriculum design	Implications for ITE pedagogy
1979	Conservative government elected (Margaret Thatcher 1979-1990, John Major 1990-1997)					
	Key school-related reforms:					
1986:	introduction of General Certificate of Education (GCSE) examinations for pupils aged 16;					
1988:	Education Reform Act, which included the introduction of the National Curriculum for schools; four Key Stages (for pupils aged 5-16); Local Management of Schools (more financial autonomy for some schools)					
1995:	Revised National Curriculum					
1983	Teaching in Schools: The Context of Initial Training	Recently re-elected Conservative government (under Margaret Thatcher) with a social reform agenda. Teacher education identified as being key to other educational reform. University teacher education considered to be overly theoretical and of little relevance to practice.	Proposal to set up the Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education (CATE). New controls over the structure and content of initial teacher training.			
1984	Initial teacher training: approval of courses. Circular 3/84	Part of the government's education reform agenda. Legislation to implement the key policy areas of the 1983 White Paper. Move of responsibility for the ITE curriculum to a national body.	Establishment of CATE. Student teacher outcomes to be determined by competency indicators. Requirement for teacher educators to have 'recent, substantial and relevant experience in schools'.	Requirements for practising teachers to be involved in all aspects of ITE. Teachers to have a greater role in the selection of student teachers.		
1992-1993	Initial Teacher Training (Secondary Phase), Circular 9/92	Influential critiques around the quality of teacher education and the relevance of existing programmes to practice.	Contractual arrangements for partnership, including required funding agreements. Teacher Training Agency (TTA) to replace CATE.	More responsibility for schools in the planning and management of ITE programmes.		
	The Initial Training of Primary School Teachers: new criteria for course approval, Circular 16/93					
	Government White Paper (1993)					

(Continued)

Table 1. (Continued).

Year	Policy	Context	Content	Prominence given to schools	Implications for ITE curriculum design	Implications for ITE pedagogy
1997	Labour government elected (Tony Blair 1997–2007, Gordon Brown 2007–2010) Key school-related reforms: 1988: National Literacy and Numeracy Strategies 2000: Revised National Curriculum (further revision in 2008) 2004: Every Child Matters: a change for children in schools (DFES, 2004) 1997 Circular 10/97 Teaching: High Status, High Standards	The new government was keen to have oversight over teacher education and development as part of its wider prioritising of education as a policy priority.	New criteria for ITT courses. Defined curricula for Primary English and mathematics. Standards for the Award of Qualified Teacher Status (QTS) introduced. Proposal to establish a General Teaching Council for England (GTCE)	Re-iterated the requirements for partnership working, for example: 'Schools are fully and actively involved in the planning and delivery of ITT, as well as in the selection and final assessment of trainees'.	Clearly defined and detailed content for the ITT curricula for specific subjects within Primary ITT programmes.	
1998	Circular 4/98 Teaching: High Status, High Standards (updated)	As above.	Updated criteria for ITT courses. Added curricula for ICT; Primary science; Secondary English, mathematics and science.	As above.	Clearly defined and detailed content for the ITT curricula for specific subjects across Primary and Secondary ITT programmes.	
2000	Professional skills tests become a statutory requirement for achieving QTS in England (numeracy, literacy and information and communication technology).	Response to concerns that aspiring teachers needed to be able to demonstrate competence in relation to work-related literacy and numeracy requirements.				

(Continued)



Table 1. (Continued).

Year	Policy	Context	Content	Prominence given to schools	Implications for ITE curriculum design	Implications for ITE pedagogy
2000	General Teaching Council for England (GTCE) established.	Fulfilment of the policy announced in Circular 10/97.	The GTCE became the awarding body for QTS, as well as the regulatory body for teachers. Registration with the GTC was a legal requirement for qualified teachers in maintained schools.			
2001	National Partnership Programme (NPP) (subsequently withdrawn in 2005)	Teacher shortages and concerns about the quantity and quality of school placements, particularly the quality of mentoring.	Setting up of a national project with devolved regional groups, each led by a Regional Partnership Manager (appointed by the TTA) and each having a Regional Steering Group.	Schools encouraged to increase capacity in terms of numbers of ITT placements offered. Partnership Promotion Schools involved in outreach work with other schools.		
2002	QTS Standards revised	The establishment of the GTCE was followed by a revised set of QTS Standards.		School involvement in funded projects		
2004	Introduction of Training Schools	Complementary policy in relation to the NPP.				
2007	Professional Standards for Teachers (including QTS Standards) revised	The Every Child Matters Agenda was a cross-government policy focussing on the effective integration of the whole range of children's services.	The Common Core of Skills and Knowledge for the Children's Workforce (DFES, 2005)			
2010	Coalition government	Conservative – Liberal Democrats elected	(David Cameron (2010–2016)			
2011	Key school-related reforms:					
2014	onwards: Academies programme; introduction of Free Schools (and following): Revised National Curriculum					

(Continued)

Table 1. (Continued).

Year	Policy	Context	Content	Prominence given to schools	Implications for ITE curriculum design	Implications for ITE pedagogy
2010 – 2011	The Importance of Teaching: the Schools White Paper 2010 Training our next generation of outstanding teachers: implementation plan 2011 TDA abolished. GTC abolished.	Incoming Coalition government seeking to deregulate ITT provision and give more responsibility to schools for decision making. Expansion of routes into teaching.	Introduction of School Direct. Expansion of Teach First and introduction of 'Troops to Teachers'. New 'Teaching Agency' set up. Proposals for the introduction of Teaching Schools	Significant promotion of the role of schools in ITE. Schools are given the opportunity to take on more responsibility for the selection and training of new teachers, either as part of an established partnership or through one of the new innovative routes into teaching.		
2013	Skills tests in ICT dropped. Skills Tests in Literacy and Numeracy 'toughened up'	Perceived need to strengthen the entrance requirements to ITT courses.	Prospective teachers now had to sit and pass both skills tests (literacy and numeracy) at a higher level than previously before starting a teacher training course			
2014	Teaching Schools initiative	The concept of Teaching Schools was introduced in the 2010 White paper (see above). These were to be successful schools that would take a leading role in the development of the government's drive towards more school-based teacher education.	The invitation for schools to apply to become a Teaching School sets out the selection criteria and the central role that designated Teaching Schools would play (namely in three areas: 'providing high-quality school-led initial teacher training (ITT)'; 'providing high-quality school-to-school support'; and 'providing evidence-based professional development' for teachers and school leaders (DfE, 2014b).	Further prominence given to the school's role within ITT. Schools with capacity and experience have the opportunity to be designated as Teaching Schools and to take a leadership role in programme development and school-to-school support in relation to ITE work.		

(Continued)



Table 1. (Continued).

Year	Policy	Context	Content	Prominence given to schools	Implications for ITE curriculum design	Implications for ITE pedagogy
2015	Carter Review of ITT	Implementation of the government's 2010 reforms had led to multiple routes into teaching and a concern about quality across all provision.	To define effective ITT practice and to suggest systemic improvements. Improve 'transparency of training offers'.	Identification, in the final report, of the need for greater clarity in relation to the role of the school-based mentor (see below).	Identification, in the final report, of the need for greater consistency across providers in the content of individual ITE programmes (see below).	The final report includes discussion as to what are considered to be effective pedagogical models within ITE, but this discussion does not feature in the final recommendations.
2015	Conservative government elected	Theresa May 2016–2019, Boris Johnson 2019–2022, Elizabeth Truss 2022–2022. Rishi Sunak 2022–2024				
2016	National Standards for school-based initial teacher training (ITT) mentors	Followed from the Carter Review recommendation that a set of non-statutory standards for school-based mentors should be developed in order to bring about greater levels of consistency in mentoring across all providers.	The standards address four aspects of mentoring: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> personal qualities and relationships; supporting the trainee's teaching; inducting the trainee into the profession; the mentor's own professional development. 	Focus on the work of mentors for the first time in government policy.		
2016	A framework of core content for initial teacher training (ITT)	Followed from the Carter Review recommendation that the DfE should commission a sector body to develop a framework of core content for ITT to address the perceived issue of variability across providers in terms of content.	This first iteration of an ITT core content framework aligned designated content closely to the Teachers' Standards and sought to define 'the essential elements of course content required to support trainees to meet the Teachers' Standards at the level appropriate to the end of a period of initial teacher training' (2016; para 1.3).		Focus on curriculum content.	

(Continued)

Table 1. (Continued).

Year	Policy	Context	Content	Prominence given to schools	Implications for ITE curriculum design	Implications for ITE pedagogy
2019	Recruitment and Retention Strategy	Recruitment and retention of teachers identified as a serious policy problem.	Launch of the Early Career Framework to support recently qualified teachers with a two-year statutory period of supported induction. The strategy also included the intention to review the ITT market.			
2020	Skills tests replaced by provider-led assurance of fundamental English and Mathematics through interview and/or on course.					
2021	ITT Market Review	Part of 'a broader arc of wide-ranging and profound reform to teacher training' Follow-up to the Carter Review and the subsequent compulsory ITT Core Content Framework (CCF) (see https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/initial-teacher-training-itt-core-content-framework .)	Focus on quality and capacity within the system (rather than the focus being on rationalising provision and identifying the scope for greater reach of quality provision, as had been suggested by the Recruitment and Retention Strategy)	Prescribed requirements for mentor training within every programme. Identification of the role of 'lead mentor'. Integration between provider-led and school-led provision through the requirement for 20 days (in addition to the usual practicum time requirements) of intensive Training and Practice experiences.	All accredited providers must demonstrate fidelity to the CCF. Content is determined by the 'Learn that ...' statements within the CCF.	The CCF also contains a parallel set of 'Learn how to ...' statements which are explicit about the way in which specific pieces of content should be learnt.

debates that accompany the call for greater regulatory intervention are often driven by a rejection of what university-led ITE has to offer, whereas those that focus on developing models of more integrated partnership working tend to be concerned with the distinctive contributions that schools and universities each have to make to beginning teachers' learning.

Taking the long view of ITE policy reform in this way, and in particular exploring the prominence given to the role of schools within ITE partnerships, has led to the identification of four themes discernible to a greater or lesser extent across the five decades.

Teacher education as a 'policy problem'

The first theme revealed by our analysis reveals is the emergence of teacher education in England as a 'policy problem' (Cochran-Smith 2005, 4). In ascribing this description to the phenomenon, Cochran-Smith emphasises that the term is not being used pejoratively but rather reflects the fact that, throughout the world, governments face similar problems, such as the need to ensure the supply of suitably qualified teachers who will go on to secure the pupil outcomes necessary for future economic prosperity. Policy makers, she argues, identify those areas most within their control in terms of improving teacher quality, and the 'policy parameters' on which they focus are therefore 'the broad structural arrangements and regulations of teacher education' (4). Wider education reform in many countries has gone hand-in-hand with a 'global teacher education policy push' (Kennedy 2024, 2), premised on the perceived need to improve the quality of teaching overall. We can see over the past 50 years that successive governments in England have been keen to address what they saw as concerns about the structure of ITE and its location, although establishing the desired structures appears not to have addressed these concerns to their satisfaction, necessitating a new focus, the control of programme content. While much of the responsibility for ITE has been deregulated as the 'market' has been opened up to other providers (for example, SCITTs) and a wider range of routes into teaching has been permitted, successive governments have found further regulation necessary in order to control all aspects of ITE, including required structures, regulated programme content and a narrowly prescribed curriculum, and detailed criteria for programme accreditation, all of which is subject to regular government inspection. The most recent reforms introduced through the ITT Market Review have led Ellis and Childs to claim that 'England now has the most tightly regulated and centrally controlled system of ITE anywhere in the world' (2023, 2). Whilst England is no different to many other countries in terms of its push for ITE policy reform (as Mayer 2021, illustrates with examples from a range of different countries), it is the nature and pace at which this reform has taken place that cause it to be seen as an outlier.

The political drive to give schools a greater role in ITE partnerships

Over the past 50 years, ITE policy reform in England has consistently focussed on giving schools more responsibility for the preparation of teachers. Before 1974, schools were too often seen merely as sites where student teachers were placed during limited periods of 'teaching practice', rather than being considered integral to ITE partnership working, with the knowledge, expertise and experience of practising teachers regarded as an essential

source of learning for beginning teachers. Yet much of the policy emphasis on increasing schools' responsibility for the selection, training and assessment of new teachers has been inextricably linked to a more ideological stance of seeking to reduce the perceived power of universities (Whitty 2014). This position characterised certain critiques from the 1980s onwards and continued into the most recent reforms. Over the same period, the voice of a wider group of stakeholders (including universities) was generally marginalised, even when an ostensible consultation process took place (Ball 1997; J. McIntyre, Youens, and Stevenson 2019). What is noticeable is the relatively small number of 'actors' actually involved in ITE policy making. From 2015 onwards, there was an emphasis on the appointment of 'experts', many of whom represented the school sector through their leading roles in organisations such as the Teaching Schools Council, who would lead reviews of ITE or serve on advisory or 'expert' groups. While representation from the school sector was clearly essential as part of the constitution of such groups, it was the narrow range of that representation and the limited variation in the types of school and school-leaders represented that has been seen as problematic. Given this context, it is perhaps unsurprising that, beyond the rhetoric of 'school-led training' (DfE, 2011, 9), there has been a lack of deeper consideration of the role that teachers and schools might play in the education of new teachers.

The role of schools within ITE partnerships: a pedagogical approach

Despite Brisard, Menter, and Smith's (2005) contention that the logistical arrangements within ITE partnerships should take 'second place' to pedagogical concerns, the tendency of successive governments from the 1980s onwards as they legislated for contractual partnership arrangements (for example, in Circulars 9/92 and 16/93 or the introduction of School Direct in 2011) was to focus on logistical arrangements, with little or no consideration of the 'theoretical precepts' around teacher education pedagogy and curriculum. Only recently has a significant shift occurred, reflected in the revised accreditation criteria that followed the ITT Market Review, which insist that 'ITT providers must have a fully developed, evidence-based curriculum . . . that encompass[es] all aspects of the ITT Core Content Framework (CCF) as a minimum entitlement' (DfE, 2024b, 20).

This insistence, incidentally, stands in sharp contrast to recent reforms of the ITE in Wales, where student teacher learning has been placed at the centre of the newly conceptualised model, within which 'teachers themselves will have much more responsibility' (Furlong 2020, 38) and as part of which ITE is an 'active process where schools see themselves as fully involved in professional education' (43). The model in Wales has at its heart an acknowledgement that student teachers benefit from access to different forms of knowledge, which neither the university nor the school can exclusively provide (Hagger and McIntyre 2006).

The role of school-based teacher educators

Identifying these different forms of knowledge and acknowledging the essential role that schools therefore play in providing access to them inevitably raised questions about the role of school-based teacher educators, usually referred to as mentors. Although ITE policy reform since Circulars 9/92 and 16/93 has increasingly positioned

schools as the primary sites of ITE, it is striking that school-based mentoring appears to have been missing from ITE policy until 2016, with the introduction of non-statutory standards for mentoring (DfE, 2016b). Since then, however, the introduction of an expanded induction period (DfE, 2019) and a prescribed curriculum – the Initial Teacher Training and Early Career Framework (ITTECF) – to cover the first three years of teaching (DfE, 2024a) have been accompanied by increasing policy interest in the professional roles of school-based teacher educators and the processes of mentoring.

That is not to say that the lack of policy focussed specifically on ITE mentoring has meant a lack of research in this area. Just as Circulars 9/92 and 16/93 stimulated research into partnership models, they also encouraged the investigation of the ways in which experienced teachers could make their rich, contextualised – but often tacit – knowledge accessible to beginners.

Working in the context of the Oxford Internship Scheme, D. McIntyre and Hagger (1993) mapped out a series of levels at which mentors might operate, seeking to identify the different skills and strategies that could be used most effectively to enable beginning teachers to access their craft knowledge (Hagger and McIntyre 1994). These included the use of collaborative planning and teaching, as well as engagement in open discussions of the student teacher's own ideas and beliefs. These mentoring strategies align with a commitment to the process that McIntyre (1993, 375) termed 'practical theorising', which involves testing the 'feasibility, effectiveness-in-context and general practicality of ideas' through a process of classroom experimentation, discussion and observation of other teachers' practice.

Further insights into mentoring came from a six-year longitudinal study, 'Becoming a Teacher' (BaT) (Hobson et al. 2009), launched in 2003, and designed to permit analysis of experiences across a range of different training routes. Of particular significance was the attention that it focused on the emotional support that beginning teachers need from their mentors alongside practical and technical support, and the facilitation of professional learning opportunities. Further research by Kemmis et al. (2014) identified three distinct purposes for mentoring: supervision, support, and collaborative self-development, the last of which resonates strongly with the principles of 'practical theorising' as mapped out by McIntyre (1993). Other advocates of a more collaborative approach have variously adopted the terms 'facilitative' mentoring (Knight 2017) and 'educative mentoring' (Trevethan 2017). In each of these models, the mentor collaborates with their mentee to facilitate inquiry-focussed, evidence-informed, reflective learning conversations about teaching practice, enabling the mentee to develop their own theories and philosophies of teaching, rather than unquestioningly replicating those of their mentor.

Although there is consensus in the academic literature that mentoring is most effective in transforming teaching and learning when the mentor adopts a co-learning role, both Trevethan (2017) and Curtis et al. (2024) found that mentors often prioritise imparting their own experience, knowledge and practices over an interrogation and reflection with their mentee on their underpinning values. Curtis et al. (2024) found that mentees also tend automatically to position their mentors as 'experts', noting that without an active, conscious move by mentors to reject this designation of roles, 'there is every likelihood that such a positioning will concurrently be assumed by and assigned to the mentor and thus be maintained' (Curtis et al. 2024, p. 1340).

Despite this research interest in the nature of mentoring, there was a sustained period of policy silence in relation to mentoring until 2016, which saw the publication of non-statutory National Standards for school-based ITT mentors and the first iteration of the framework of core content for ITT (known as the CCF). These two documents embrace a role for mentors as 'expert colleagues' (a term which appears 57 times within the current CCF, published in 2019). The latter also details an extensive list of practices that expert mentors must help beginning teachers learn how to enact, through the mechanisms of structured rehearsal, discussion and analysis, observation and focused feedback. This model of tightly structured practice and refinement of recommended teaching behaviours under the guidance of an expert mentor appears to be an adoption of what is known as Instructional Coaching (Knight and van Nieuwerburgh 2012) and the emphasis on mentor as expert has continued in recent years, with the introduction of a new ITT 'lead mentor' role and increased expectations and resources for mentor development (DfE, 2021). From September 2025, the CCF is due to be superseded by a combined Initial Teacher Training and Early Career Framework (ITTECF) (DfE, 2024a), which creates a single 'curriculum', represented by an expanded list of essentially atomised statements, but no indication of the learning trajectory that beginners might follow as they move from initial preparation into the early years of professional practice. The implications of this prescription and the conception of mentoring that underpins these latest policies are discussed below.

Discussion and conclusions

In tracking how the role of schools has been conceptualised in England over the past 50 years, we have deliberately distinguished between the way in which government policy has tended to frame both schools and school-based teacher educators and the ways in which both have been seen by researchers. The patterns over time are obviously more complex and nuanced than can be captured fully in these brief overviews but focusing on the two conceptions of partnership identified by Brisard, Menter, and Smith (2005) – the logistical and the pedagogical – helps to reveal the fundamental shift in policy brought about by the ITT Market Review and the Quality Criteria that have been applied to all forms of ITE provision from September 2024 (DfE, 2024b).

Within the steady stream of policies since early the 1980s that have sought to increase the role played by schools in ITE, relatively little attention was originally paid by policy makers to the ways in which school-based teacher educators enacted their new roles. The levers used to bring about change focused first on the location of teacher education, initially by stipulating the minimum number of days to be spent in school (DES (1984); DfE, 1992) and subsequently by expanding school-based routes (DfE 2011). Policy makers' attention then shifted to the location of power within the teacher education programme, most obviously through the introduction of the School Direct route (DfE 2014a). While much of the impetus for these changes was rooted in an assumption that the curriculum taught within the university was inappropriate – at best insufficiently rooted in classroom realities; at worst ideologically damaging – few attempts were made to prescribe the curriculum that should be taught by schools or the way in which it was delivered. It was assumed that the policy problem of ensuring a sufficient supply of 'classroom ready' practitioners could be solved simply by entrusting the training of new recruits to the

schools. In so far as an epistemological position was ever elaborated, it was perhaps most clearly encapsulated in Gove's (2013) claim that 'Teaching is a craft ... best learnt as an apprentice observing a master craftsman or woman'. The implication of this claim was that teachers' practice-based understandings were essentially all that was required, with no need either for the exercise of critical judgement in choosing between competing priorities or for research-based insights into how or why particular strategies might be expected to work. There was certainly no need for universities.

Ten years later the confidence that schools would deliver the kind of training needed by beginners had been replaced, through the ITT Market Review and the (re)accreditation process, by a rigid set of prescriptions, specifying not only what all trainees should be taught – an extensive series of 'learn that' statements – but also the methods by which they should 'learn how' to put them into practice (DfE, 2024a). Mentors are now recognised as 'expert practitioners' playing a crucial role in the preparation of new teachers, yet the requirements of the Market Review and reaccreditation process (DfE, 2021) mean that they cannot undertake this role without having received 20 hours of training, delivered in accordance with a programme that has been carefully scrutinised and approved by the DfE. While the training requirement undoubtedly represents recognition of the important role that mentors now play, this recognition is linked to their adherence to the propositions and practices set out in the CCF.

While the recognition of the importance of mentoring and the allocation of resources to support mentors in their role can be seen as positive, the prescriptive nature of the ITTECF (DfE 2024a) creates conditions within which a directive and hierarchical model of mentoring is likely to flourish – restricting the scope for more facilitative, dialogic models in which both mentor and mentee have agency over the setting of goals, selection of strategies and criteria for evaluation, and in which collaborative self-development (Kemmis et al. 2014) becomes possible. It is also likely that a focus on coaching beginners in execution of the tightly defined teaching strategies endorsed by the ITTECF will direct beginning teachers' attention to *what* they are doing (behaviours) rather than developing their understanding about underlying questions of *how* and *why* certain classroom actions may achieve particular ends and about the ethical grounds on which they should choose between competing priorities. Lastly, there is a risk that the static nature of the ITTECF (the same set of statements serve as the basis for teacher development over three years) may fail to alert mentors to the developmental trajectory of beginning teachers and their changing needs over time.

Looking to the future role of schools in teacher education

In setting out these fears about the atomised nature of the ITTECF and its lack of attention to contextualised professional judgement, our intention is to highlight the power of partnership as the basis of any principled approach to ITE and to emphasise the importance of epistemological and pedagogical considerations in determining how that partnership should operate. It is our contention that a genuinely collaborative relationship between HEIs and schools offers powerful protection against limiting visions of mentoring that tend either to elevate situated craft knowledge or to over-emphasise decontextualised technicist approaches, when in fact both are needed *alongside* the capacity for critical reflection, including ethical judgement in the face

of competing (and often irreconcilable) priorities (Winch, Oancea, and Orchard 2015). The concept of a 'core content framework' has considerable potential as a basis for partnership working, but for it to serve that purpose, it would need to be designed as a framework, not a series of discrete, atomised statements (Hordern and Brooks 2023) and subject to regular critical review on the basis of agreed selection criteria. We welcome the acknowledgement in recent government communications that 'frameworks need to evolve as the underpinning evidence evolves' (DfE, 2024c, 5) as a first step in this direction.

Mentors do indeed need to be recognised as 'expert practitioners' and should be offered appropriate professional development in taking up the role, but their expertise does not lie solely in a finely tuned repertoire of routine practices, nor in their mastery of a range of theoretical propositions about how pupils learn. It lies in their capacity to explain and to evaluate the practices that they are using; to diagnose their impact on specific children's learning and to identify where and for whom they may not be working, as well where and for whom they are. Their expertise lies in their contextual knowledge and in their awareness of the need to keep reviewing and adapting what they are doing; in the model that they present of teaching as a process of constant learning rather than teaching as performance.

As this emphasis on mentors' contextualised knowledge implies, it is impossible to conceptualise the role of school-based teacher educators without simultaneously considering how their contribution relates to that of colleagues based in universities. Every move to enhance the role or influence the work of mentors has consequences for any university partners with whom they work and, as we have noted, some policies were specifically designed to minimise or eliminate the influence of university providers. Others, most obviously the Market Review and its associated requirements including approval of teaching materials with reference to the CCF have raised serious questions about the scope for universities to operate *as* universities, given the tight prescription of the approved evidence base. The limits of space preclude an extensive discussion here of the role of the university, but it will be clear from our analysis and reflections so far that we regard the contribution of *both* partners as essential to effective teacher education. When schools and HEIs work in collaborative partnership, embracing reflection, critique and open dialogue, the particular affordances of both institutions for student teacher learning can be effectively leveraged. The inevitable contradictions and tensions generated by multiple contexts, when handled productively, create continual professional growth opportunities for everyone involved. The role that both mentors and HEI tutors play within such partnerships is to create safe spaces for open dialogue, where student teachers can explore and learn to navigate the '(sometimes competing) discourses and systems which are prevalent in the other spaces they inhabit' (J. McIntyre and Hobson 2016, 137).

As we have acknowledged, a regular (if not constant) process of teacher education policy reform is a widespread experience across the world (Ellis, Steadman, and Trippstad 2019), even if England has been subject to more intensive reforms than most. The framing of teacher education as 'a policy problem' (Cochran-Smith 2005) has given rise to extensive 'policy borrowing', making it more than likely that the kinds of processes set in train by the Market Review in England will be proposed elsewhere. Even if England is currently an outlier, the patterns of intervention and the shift in government focus, from

the location of teacher education to the content of the ITE programme and ultimately to the manner of its delivery, are worth highlighting as likely forms of policy development elsewhere.

Our drafting of this article and reflection on the editors' invitation to articulate our hopes for the future role of schools in teacher education has coincided with the election of a new UK government. Teacher recruitment is high on the list of priorities announced by the incoming Secretary of State for Education, Bridget Phillipson, but little attention has so far been paid to the processes by which these new teachers will be prepared for the profession or to the kinds of changes within educational policy that might be needed to retain them. The language of partnership featured prominently, however, in Phillipson's (2024) letter to the education workforce, in which she promised that the government would collaborate with teachers 'as essential and valued partners'. Our hope is that the rhetoric of partnership will prove to be a reality and that it will encompass teacher education as a pedagogical practice rather than an institutional arrangement; not merely affording expert teachers' greater agency in their work as mentors but permitting them and their university partners to focus on the distinctive contribution that they can each make to beginning teachers' learning.

Note

1. The term initial *teacher education* poses some problems. While many universities continue to designate the courses they offer as programmes of initial teacher *education* (ITE), initial teacher *training* (ITT) is the term used in all government documentation in England. In this paper, we use the terms initial teacher education and ITE, other than when specifically referring to government policy documentation.

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