Response to the Estyn thematic report on initial teacher education and professional learning

Report title:
The professional learning continuum: mentoring in initial teacher education

Report details:

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

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

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

Summary of main findings:

The most effective mentoring takes place in schools where there is an established culture of learning. In these schools, there is a strong focus on developing effective teaching. These schools see themselves as 'learning schools' and that the practice of developing student teachers is part of the same process as developing practising teachers.

In the most effective schools, mentoring has a high status and headteachers identify mentors strategically. However, in many schools, even where there is an emphasis on developing and coaching teachers, mentors do not apply the skills they have learnt through whole-school professional development activities to their mentoring of student teachers.

The mentor training currently provided by the centres of ITE places too much emphasis on completion of documentation rather than developing the skills, knowledge and understanding required to mentor successfully. There is no common understanding of coaching and mentoring and too many mentors do

not have good enough knowledge, understanding and skills of the most effective approaches in teacher education.

Many mentors have a good understanding of their role, as required by the ITE centre. Mentors view their role mainly in terms of supporting students to meet the standards for QTS and assessing their progress towards this goal. Very few mentors see their role as teacher educators engaged in the pedagogy of ITE, or identify specifically the approaches that they take to teaching students how to teach, including developing subject knowledge and developing pedagogy.

The few most effective mentors have a good understanding of how to build students' knowledge and experience incrementally. They build students' resilience well.

These effective mentors are often actively engaged in professional learning activities, research, or higher-level study. These mentors use their skills of reflection and critical analysis to develop student teachers. They are good role models of career-long professional learning.

Effective mentors provide accurate written feedback that captures students' progress fairly and holistically. The most effective mentors teach their students using 'learning conversations', dialogue that develops students' critical and reflective skills, and helps students to analyse the practice of teaching and consider educational theory.

Currently, there are too few links between the university-based and school-based aspects of ITE programmes and too few opportunities for students to connect educational theory to teaching practice.

Very few students are able to identify the skills and behaviours that they need for career-long professional learning. Generally, students do not develop their skills of critical analysis, reflection and evaluation well enough over the duration of their programmes. They do not engage well enough with research and professional dialogue with their tutors and mentors to make the crucial links between theory and practice.

A majority of students benefit from undertaking research projects that require them to reflect on teaching and learning and to connect this valuably to educational research. However, many students do not find that the assignments that they are required to write help them to develop their teaching skills.

In the main, students do not reflect critically enough in the written evaluations of their teaching and progress against their targets. They do not present evidence of deeper thinking, such as making connections between other learning experiences, or draw upon research and wider reading.

Recommendations:
A total of 12 recommendations are presented in the report, of which 5 are for ITE partnership schools and 6 are for ITE University providers and 1 is for

Welsh Government.

Recommendations for ITE partnership schools:

R1 Link their work in ITE more strongly to the development of practice and provision in school, and especially to that of professional learning

R2 Work closely with their university partners to ensure that mentors have the skills, knowledge and understanding necessary for teacher educators

R3 Develop robust plans to improve the research skills of school staff, making the most of their partnership with their university partner

R4 Ensure that senior mentors play a strategic role in developing mentors and in evaluating the effectiveness of ITE partnership working

R5 Work alongside university partners to design and implement ITE programmes that ensure a successful blend of theory and practice.

Welsh Government Response to recommendations 1-5:

These recommendations are for ITE partnership schools and we accept their content.

We welcome these recommendations to schools as they mirror our own expectations and reflect our vision of ITE in Wales, the Professional Standards for Teaching and Leadership and the principles of the National Approach to Professional Learning.

We have published the new *Criteria for the accreditation of initial teacher education programmes in Wales*, a key document in our ITE reforms, outlining the vision and requirements for ITE in Wales including the requirements for schools and HEIs to work together to support the development of student teachers. Firstly, at the programme level, programmes need to be devised so that there are structured opportunities for the different forms of professional knowledge provided by each partner to be brought together. Student teachers need regular and well-structured mentoring within their schools; in their universities they need high quality lectures, seminars and workshops. But in addition they will need opportunities, while they are based in school, to engage with the forms of knowledge that are made available through universities; when they are in university they need opportunities to engage with forms of practical knowledge that are learned in school.

The criteria make clear future ITE provision in Wales must have:
- an increased role for schools
- a clearer role for universities
- joint ownership of the ITE programme
- structured opportunities to link school and university learning
- centrality of research.

As such the criteria set out what is required of all partnership schools (both

lead partnership schools and others) which include:

- the need to develop a 'whole school' approach to teacher education under the leadership of senior teachers
- school staffing and responsibilities for supporting student teachers' learning including mentoring
- staff development opportunities
- schools' involvement in the joint management of the programme.

The newly accredited ITE programmes are available from September 2019.

Recommendations for Universities:

R6 Work closely with schools to support the development of research skills and strategies

R7 Improve mentor training and development to focus more on the skills of teacher education

R8 Work with schools to develop more robust processes to evaluate the quality of mentoring

R9 Work alongside university partners to design programmes that ensure a successful blend of theory and practice

R10 Strengthen student teachers' skills of reflection, evaluation and critical analysis

R11 In collaboration with their partner schools, consider the most effective ways to assess students that takes good account of their development towards QTS

Welsh Government response to recommendations 6-11:

These recommendations are for ITE Provider Universities and we accept their content**.**

We welcome these recommendations to ITE Provider Universities as they mirror our own expectations under the *Criteria for the accreditation of initial teacher education programmes in Wales.*

Welsh Government should:

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

Welsh Government Response

Building professional capacity is one of the core purposes of ITE. The *Criteria for the accreditation of ITE Programmes in Wales* (published March 2017) will ensure that all courses of ITE meet the government's high aspirations for the teaching profession in Wales and newly accredited programmes will be

available from September 2019.

Central to the vision underpinning the new criteria is the recognition that high quality professional education necessarily involves a number of different modes of learning. We recognise that high quality, effective mentoring facilitating aspects of these modes of learning is an essential part of rigorously practical and intellectually challenging teacher education.

To this end we have funded a pilot project through a Consortium for schools to work with HEIs on accredited mentoring programmes to support ITE for both the Welsh and English medium sector and are awaiting the results. The result will be used to explore with our newly accredited ITE providers how best to ensure the skills, knowledge and understanding required to mentor successfully is developed in our teacher educators to best support student teachers.

In addition Welsh Government will be exploring best practice and developing guidance with regards to assessment of QTS in accordance with the new Professional Standards for Teaching and Leadership.

Publication details.

The report was published on Estyn's website on 15 October 2018

www.estyn.gov.wales/thematic-reports