

### Context

Following a series of accreditation events there are now seven accredited partnerships of initial teacher education (ITE) in Wales, comprising universities and their partner schools. The partnerships provide undergraduate and post-graduate routes into teaching. From September 2020, two new routes, both leading to post graduate certificate of education (PGCE), became available, a part-time route, and an employment-based route, both provided by the Open University Partnership.

In 2020-2021, we continued to work with the partnerships to pilot approaches to inspection that align with the new accreditation procedures for ITE. In collaboration with the sector, we undertook three trial activities virtually, to test different inspection methodologies.

In addition to this work, we kept in contact with all the ITE partnerships throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. We held virtual engagement meetings with leaders of individual providers and with ITE leads in regional consortia, focusing on the wellbeing of students and staff, support for teaching and learning, and leadership throughout the pandemic. We also held regular stakeholder events and worked with the sector to develop our inspection guidance materials.



# Sector summaries: Initial teacher education

## Recruitment

In September 2020, 1,498 students were recruited onto full-time ITE programmes. Eight-hundred and eight joined primary programmes and 690 began secondary programmes. In addition, 138 students (43 secondary and 95 primary) were recruited to the Open University's routes<sup>1</sup>.

After several years of poor recruitment, there was an overall increase in the number of students recruited to ITE programmes this year. Primary numbers increased by 35%, and secondary by 59%. This uplift in recruitment varied from partnership to partnership, and although increasing, the number of students training in subjects where there is a shortage of teachers in the secondary sector remains a concern. The most significant shortage is in students training to be teachers of Welsh. The proportion of students training to teach through the medium of Welsh across secondary subjects has remained about the same for the past few years and differs in each partnership. The Welsh Government requires partnerships to work towards recruiting 30% of each cohort as Welsh-medium students. Only one partnership achieved this for the academic year 2020-2021.

## Standards and wellbeing

Students responded positively to the challenges of training this year. School staff in particular noted strengths in students' digital skills, which helped them to engage with remote learning during periods of lockdown. Staff in some partnership schools also expressed gratitude for the way in which students supported the school in developing digital approaches to learning.

As a response to the changes to programmes brought about by the pandemic, students demonstrated strengths in particular attitudes and behaviours this year, such as flexibility, adaptability, perseverance and resilience. Partnerships identified that students had honed specific skills in their teaching, for example their questioning skills when planning for online learning, and had approached planning and resourcing in new ways in preparing asynchronous<sup>2</sup> lessons.

### Celebrating the work of students in an online conference

In May 2021, Yr Athrofa Professional Learning Partnership held an 'Aiming for Excellence' conference, which included presentations by leading professionals. The conference also provided a platform for students on all ITE programmes in the partnership to present aspects of their research, practice and learning from their experiences of training in 2020-2021. Through the conference, the partnership demonstrated the adaptability and commitment of staff in the university and partner schools to continue to support students and celebrated the resilience of students throughout this challenging time.

## Developing students' understanding of digital pedagogies

The University of South Wales Partnership has well-established expertise in digital learning. In adapting the BA (Hons) Primary programme for 2020-2021, partnership leaders realised that the development of students' digital skills would be vitally important in helping students to manage the demands of remote learning. Approaches to digital teaching and learning are integrated across the ITE programme, providing students with a strong foundation of understanding of the pedagogy of using digital tools. All students are provided with a digital device to explore approaches and applications, and university tutors created videos to support the students' use of various applications with pupils. As a result, students adapted well to teaching online. They investigated a range of creative solutions to remote learning across many curriculum areas. Students report that they learnt many new skills during lockdown.

<sup>1</sup> Unpublished data provided by the Education Workforce Council (EWC)

<sup>2</sup> Asynchronous learning takes place when practitioners prepare lessons that learners access at different times. It offers learners flexibility in their study. Asynchronous learning often takes place online and may include pre-recorded lessons that learners watch independently.

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However, the restrictions brought about by COVID-1, have meant that students have had fewer opportunities to engage in:

- teaching practical sessions
- planning for a full range of learning in a subject, particularly those following secondary programmes, including planning for GCSE and A level students
- interacting with pupils in the classroom and wider contexts, such as break-time, lunchtime, and learning outside of the classroom
- working with other adults in the classroom and observing teachers working in a range of contexts
- a range of classroom management approaches
- testing out the links between theory and practice in school

As a response, the Welsh Government (2021j) has provided a grant scheme to support those on ITE programmes in 2020-2021 who, due to COVID restrictions in Wales, either on a national, local or individual basis, have been unable to gain sufficient school experience to evidence attainment for award of QTS.

### Teaching and learning

The restrictions of the pandemic meant that students were unable to undertake experiences in school in the ways that these were originally planned for the autumn term. As a response, all partnerships redesigned their programmes to bring forward academic and theoretical study to the start of the year. There were limited opportunities for students, mentors and tutors to meet face-to-face, but when this occurred, students benefited from the chance to explore aspects of classroom practice and to build relationships with their peers and partnership staff. A few partnerships provided valuable opportunities for students to test out their teaching strategies through online 'micro-teaching'<sup>3</sup>. This helped students to build their confidence and their repertoire of approaches in a supportive environment.

The necessary re-organisation of the programmes, combined with the difficulties of working in school, meant that students had fewer opportunities to investigate the links between theory and practice in the classroom, or to gather evidence to support their research assignments. However, in some schools, students had more opportunities to engage in professional learning with school staff through virtual professional development events. In the most effective of the lead schools, students have been able to experience approaches to career-long professional learning, and to see how these schools support staff to continuously develop their ideas and skills.

### A modified approach to research to support school improvement

The Cardiff Partnership reconsidered the approach taken to students' research assignments this year. PGCE students were unable to collect evidence in schools to explore the links between theory and practice in the autumn term. Instead, they analysed critically a range of educational literature to investigate an area of development from their school's improvement plan. They worked with the 'Research Champions' in the lead schools to ensure that their approach would be relevant to the school's context. This helped to reinforce the research culture in the school. Students produced an infographic to illustrate key ideas in tackling the issue. In some cases, students presented their findings to senior leaders and to school governors. The assignment helped students to consider how research might be used to improve practice in a real-life context. At the same time, lead schools reported that the students' work was beneficial to the school.

<sup>3</sup> A technique that allows students to practise their teaching to a small group of their peers

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A particular challenge this year has been preparing students to teach the Curriculum for Wales. Partnership schools are at various stages of development in preparing for the new curriculum, as outlined in our report 'Preparing for the Curriculum for Wales' (Estyn, 2020h). Many lead schools have been involved with curriculum reform as pioneer, innovation or Quality Improvement schools, and university tutors have also engaged in various aspects of the Curriculum for Wales work. However, opportunities for students to gain first-hand experiences of how schools were preparing for the curriculum have been limited, particularly in secondary schools. In the best cases, especially in primary schools, staff encouraged students to develop innovative plans for learning, and students experienced how schools were approaching curriculum reform in different contexts. Approaches to developing students' understanding of curriculum design and development are too variable across all programmes.

All programmes have processes to assess students' trajectory towards Qualified Teacher Status (QTS) as set out in revised guidance [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\): additional temporary guidance for Initial Teacher Education \(ITE\) partnerships January 2021](#) (Welsh Government, 2021c). All partnership staff understand the principles of doing this, although in practice it has been challenging to work with all partners to ensure that everyone has a common understanding of how to judge the trajectory of students' progress against the standards for QTS. Overall, students found the process of submitting evidence challenging. They found it difficult to identify relevant evidence, particularly against standards where they feel that they have too little experience. In 2021-2022, those students who need further support will be able to gather more evidence through the Welsh Government grant scheme.

### Leadership

Despite the uncertainties of COVID-19, universities and lead schools have demonstrated notable tenacity and agility in working together to support student teachers this year. Lead schools have shown a particular commitment to ITE, ensuring that they continued to provide the school-based elements of the programmes during times when they faced significant challenges due the pandemic.

All partnerships have systems to track the progress of students and intervene in a timely and appropriate way when issues with individual students arise. However, although many partnerships collected a wide range of data about students' progress, effective systems to identify strengths and areas for improvement to inform improvements are at an early stage of development.

### Alternative approaches to supporting student teachers in school

Before the pandemic, link university tutors from the Aberystwyth Partnership would visit schools to evaluate a student's progress. To overcome the restrictions of travelling to schools, the Aberystwyth Partnership developed a process of 'unseen observations'. Prior to the student teaching a lesson, the student and their university tutor met online to discuss the lesson plan and intended learning. After the mentor had observed the student teaching, the student, the mentor and the university tutor met again online. The tutor listened to the mentor providing feedback and the student reflecting on the lesson. Then, all three participants discussed how the student could make progress. The strategy allowed for an ongoing dialogue between tutors, mentors and students.

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All partnerships faced difficulties in placing students in school this year because of COVID-19 restrictions. Consequently, partnerships reached out to a wider network of schools to support students. Developing relationships with the regional consortia supported the sharing of information about schools, which helped the partnerships with student placements. However, the expansion of the partnerships, together with limitations on visiting schools, meant that partnerships have not undertaken quality assurance procedures and individual mentor development as planned. As a result, students have had significantly variable school experiences.

All partnerships found value in meeting virtually and this has benefited their development. Many partnerships have developed new ways of working with their mentors that overcome geographical boundaries and time constraints. Webinars and online professional learning events have supported mentors in developing their practice. In the most effective cases, mentors have shared their experiences and their research of mentoring through the pandemic.

All partnerships demonstrated a strong commitment to collaboration, and their working relationships are maturing. Each partnership ensured that all partners were equally represented on leadership boards and committees. They are beginning to explore the ways that the expertise of each partner organisation may contribute most effectively to the strategic leadership of the partnership. All partnerships are developing a culture of research-informed practice. Universities are supporting the development of inquiry in their lead schools, and partnerships are working together to inform the development of the sector.

### **Using research to develop approaches to the assessment of student teachers**

At the CaBan partnership, a mentor development group comprising partnership staff from school and university is carrying out research to find the most effective way to describe a student teacher's progress through their ITE programme. They have reviewed the literature on student progression to identify typical behaviours at certain points of a novice teacher's development. This has informed a set of descriptors to be used by mentors in assessing students' progress towards QTS.

The tutors and mentors in the group are investigating this aspect of their work as part of their own post-graduate research studies. The partnership will pilot the use of the draft descriptors and guidance for assessment across the partnership. Following the pilot, the partnership will evaluate and refine these approaches.



