# Estyn

# Engagement work

Initial Teacher Education
Sector update 2020-2021

## Introduction

This report summarises the findings from engagement calls made to all ITE partnerships in Wales between September 2020 and June 2021.  The report is based on the information discussed during remote meetings with partnership leaders, tutors and mentors and student teachers.

This report has been informed by evidence from the following sources:

- Remote meetings with partnership leaders, representatives from lead partnership schools and student representatives
- Remote meetings with partnership staff and students during our virtual try-out visits
- Discussions with partnership staff from school and university in our stakeholder fora

## Background

Following a series of accreditation events there are now seven partnerships (comprising universities and their partner schools) of initial teacher education (ITE) in Wales.  The partnerships provide undergraduate and post-graduate routes into teaching.  From September 2020, two new routes became available, a part-time PGCE 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 initial teacher education.  In collaboration with the sector, we undertook three further 'try-out' activities virtually, to test out different inspection methodologies.

In addition to this work, we have kept in contact with all the ITE partnerships throughout the COVID-19 pandemic.  We have held virtual engagement meetings with individual providers and regional consortia ITE leads, and worked with the sector to develop our inspection guidance materials.

The new programmes of ITE that began in September 2019 require:

- an increased role for schools
- a clearer role for universities
- joint ownership of the ITE programme between schools and higher education institutions
- structured opportunities to link school and university learning
- the centrality of research[1]

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[1] https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2018-09/criteria-for-the-accreditation-of-initial-teacher-education-programmes-in-wales.pdf

The partnerships created through the new accreditation processes operate in a different way to those partnerships of the past.  In many instances, they are built on well-established relationships between HEIs and schools.  The emphasis on co-construction of programmes, of joint leadership and joint accountability in the accreditation criteria has brought about new ways of working.  COVID-19 has brought significant challenges in developing the work of the partnerships and in designing the new programmes.  The commitment of partners to providing ITE in these uncertain times has been commendable.
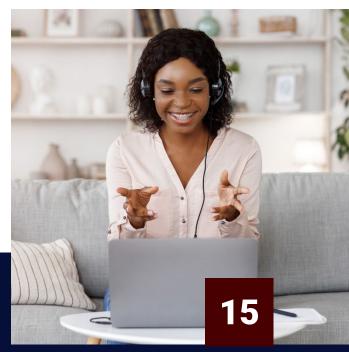
**This report is also available in Welsh**.

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## Main findings

### Recruitment

1   There has been an overall increase in the number of student teachers recruited to ITE this year but recruitment to priority subjects (those where there are teacher shortages) still remains a concern.

2   The increase in recruitment is probably due to uncertainties in employment brought about by the pandemic.  In addition, temporary guidance from the Welsh Government allowed partnerships to recruit students who had not achieved a grade B in English and mathematics at GCSE with the requirement that they passed an equivalency test during their programme.

### Standards and wellbeing

3   Partnership staff report that students have coped positively with the challenges of training this year.  They note that the demands of learning and teaching during the pandemic has strengthened students' understanding of digital approaches to teaching and learning.

4   Tutors and mentors also noted that in facing the difficulties of training this year, students have demonstrated strengths in their flexibility, adaptability, perseverance and resilience.

5   Through their experiences of teaching and learning remotely, students have had to consider aspects of their teaching more carefully, such as planning and formative assessment.  They reflected on their experiences of being distance learners, and this helped them to empathise with their pupils.

6   Overall, the restrictions brought about by COVID-19, has meant that students have had fewer opportunities to engage in:

   - teaching practical sessions in subjects such as science, the arts and PE
   - planning for a full range of learning in a subject, particularly in the secondary phase, including planning for GCSE and A-level students
   - interacting with pupils in the classroom in one-to-one and group work
   - working with other adults in the classroom
   - interacting with pupils in a range of contexts, such as break-time, lunchtime, and learning outside of the classroom
   - a range of classroom management approaches
   - observing teachers working in a variety of contexts
   - testing out the links between theory and practice in school

7   The students who developed their research skills most successfully were those who were placed in schools where there was a strong culture of inquiry-based professional learning.  In these schools, students gained a valuable understanding of the interaction between theory and developing practice.

8    This year has been exceptionally challenging in terms of students' wellbeing.  They missed the usual opportunities to develop working relationships with their tutors, mentors and peers.  They valued the support provided by partnership staff and the use made by partnerships of virtual communication and support.  Many students use social media to develop networks with their fellow students online.

9    Some students found that the transition from working online in the autumn term to balancing planning for school experiences and the demands of assignments in the spring term challenging.

**Teaching and learning experiences**

10   All partnerships redesigned their programmes to 'front-load' them with academic and theoretical study.   Lead schools played a key part in the review of programmes, and this has helped to ensure that all partners are able to support students during the COVID-19 crisis.

11   Tutors and mentors who delivered online sessions were keen to make sessions as interactive as possible for students.  They experimented with different approaches and this helped to model effective practice for the students.

12   Many partnerships developed their programmes to include content on approaches to digital learning and teaching.  Taught sessions included explorations of digital learning platforms and the ways that these may be used creatively in planning lessons.  In the most effective cases, students gained an understanding of the digital pedagogies.

13   Partnership staff reviewed assignments and tasks that helped students to consider the links between theory and practice.  This was particularly effective where mentors and partnership staff in school supported students to make their theoretical study meaningful by providing opportunities for students to share their ideas with staff in the school.

14   In some schools, students have 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.

15   All partnerships benefit from their effective lead school partners.  All lead schools, staff have maintained their commitment to co-delivery of the programmes throughout the period of the pandemic.  Lead school practitioners reported that teaching the school-led programme had a positive impact on the whole school's approach to research and inquiry during the pandemic.  It provided a positive focus for the school and maintained a sense of continuity.

16   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.  Opportunities for students to gain first-hand experiences of how schools are preparing for the curriculum have been limited this year, particularly in secondary schools.

17    The lead schools, having been closely involved in planning the programmes, supported students well in their school experience. Experiences for students in the wider network of schools were more variable. These mentos did not have a clear understanding of the requirements of the programme, such as expectations about planning and teaching, support for completing assignments, and finding opportunities for students to learn from a range of practitioners.

18    All programmes have processes to assess students' trajectory towards Qualified Teacher Status (QTS). All partnership staff have an understanding of 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.

**Leadership and management**

19    ITE Partners have demonstrated notable tenacity and agility in working together to support student teachers this year. Partnerships demonstrate a strong commitment to collaboration, and working relationships are maturing. 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.

20    Due to difficulties in placing students in school this year partnerships have reached out to a wider network of schools to support students. This expansion of the partnership, together with limitations on visiting schools, has meant that partnerships have not undertaken quality assurance procedures and individual mentor development as planned. As a result, students have had significantly variable experiences.

21    Many partnerships have developed new ways of working virtually this year. Webinars and online professional learning events have supported mentors in developing their practice. More regular, virtual meetings have afforded more opportunities for conversation, and this has strengthened the spirit of collegiality and mutual support throughout the crisis.

## 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[2].

After several years of poor recruitment, there was an overall increase in the number of students recruited to ITE programmes this year. The number of students recruited to ITE is at its highest since 2014-2015. Primary numbers increased by 35%, and secondary by 59% on last year's figures. However, this uplift in recruitment varied from partnership to partnership, and although increasing, the number of students

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[2] Unpublished data provided by the EWC.

training in secondary priority subjects (those where there are teacher shortages) remains a concern.  The most significant shortage is in students training to be teachers of Welsh.  The number of students training to teach through the medium of Welsh across secondary subjects is around the same has remained about the same for the past few years.  The proportion of students training through the medium of Welsh differs in each partnership.

The rise in recruitment in 2021 can be attributed mostly to a greater interest in PGCE programmes, and this is probably due to uncertainties in employment brought about by the pandemic.  Partnership leaders commented that they had interviewed more 'career-changers' than in previous years, and that a large number of applications came from furloughed workers.  A few partnership leaders commented that this year, they had offered places to students who had a wider range of experiences. Another contributory factor was that Welsh Government guidance also supported partnerships to recruit students who had not yet gained a GCSE grade B in English and mathematics.  The guidance waives the necessity for students to have these qualifications prior to starting the programme by allowing partnerships to provide equivalency tests for students during their programmes[3].  Overall, partnership leaders and staff have reported that they are pleased with the quality of this year's cohorts.  Many students passed their equivalency tests, and partnership leads note that the number of students requiring support was similar to that in previous years.

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[3] [covid-19-temporary-guidance-for-initial-teacher-education-ite-partnerships.pdf (gov.wales)](covid-19-temporary-guidance-for-initial-teacher-education-ite-partnerships.pdf)

# Standards and wellbeing

**All partnerships report that students have coped positively with 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 that they were unable to be in school.**

Staff in some partnership schools also expressed gratitude for the way in which students supported the school in developing digital approaches to learning. They provided numerous examples of students who suggested new software applications and resources, or who provided guidance on technical aspect of digital technology.

The restrictions of COVID-19 meant that many partnerships were unable to accommodate students in university or in schools in the autumn term. Academic sessions were provided online, and students were only able to engage with the school-based elements of their programmes remotely.

The students we spoke to reflected on their experiences of ITE at the beginning of their programmes. They talked about their frustrations at not being able to experience teaching face-to-face. However, they also praised school and university staff for their support in making the best of a difficult situation. Some students noted that their experience of being a distance learner helped them to plan for remote learning because they could empathise with their pupils.

Partnership staff have noted that, as a response to the changes to programmes brought about by the pandemic, students have demonstrated strengths in particular attitudes and behaviours this year, such as flexibility, adaptability, perseverance and resilience. They also report that students have honed specific skills in their teaching, for example, their questioning skills when planning for online learning, and that students were more focused on pedagogy because they did not have to manage pupils' behaviour as they would in a real-life context. Students reflected on the ways that they approached formative assessment because of the challenges of ascertaining pupils' understanding when teaching online. A few talked about the way this difficultly prompted them to think in different ways, for example, of how they might use the 'chat' facility to engage pupils, or use quizzes and surveys to assess pupils' progress. A few students also told us how teaching online also made them think imaginatively about the resources they might use, for example, web-based learning resources such as virtual museum visits, or multi-media content using video, sound and animation. These students felt that experimenting with these resources helped them to think more creatively about lesson planning.

Overall, the restrictions brought about by COVID-19 have meant that students have had fewer opportunities to engage in:

- teaching practical sessions in subjects such as science, the arts and PE
- planning for a full range of learning in a subject, particularly in the secondary phase, including planning for GCSE and A-level students
- interacting with pupils in the classroom in one-to-one and group work
- working with other adults in the classroom
- interacting with pupils in a range of contexts, such as break-time, lunchtime, and learning outside of the classroom
- a range of classroom management approaches
- observing teachers working in a variety of contexts
- testing out the links between theory and practice in school

Exploring the relationship between theory and practice is a key component of the new programmes. In anticipation of the restrictions of the autumn term, partnerships front-loaded the programmes with theory and academic work. This, combined with the difficulties of working in school has meant that students have had fewer opportunities to investigate the links between theory and practice in the classroom, or to gather evidence to support their research assignments. A few students noted that the concentration on educational theory and concepts in the first weeks of their programme 'immersed' them in ideas, and that they had time to consider and 'process' this information. However, many students, although they found this academic study interesting, reported that they only began to understand the theory once they were able to go into schools.

The students who developed their research skills most successfully were those who were placed in schools where there was a strong culture of inquiry-based professional learning.  In these schools, students gained a valuable understanding of the interaction between theory and developing practice.

Perhaps most significantly, student teachers missed opportunities to build working relationships with their pupils.  Many students told us that although teaching remotely helped them to consider their planning, they found it challenging to work in an environment without being able to gage pupils' responses, or have meaningful conversations with pupils about their work.  Even when they began teaching in schools, the COVID-19 restrictions in place meant that they still had to work at a distance, and found it difficult to get to know the pupils they taught.

Another difficulty was in gaining an understanding of the everyday work of a school.  Forging relationships with school staff and observing them teaching and engaging in their professional responsibilities were also aspects of the students' experience that were marred by the pandemic.

> **Cameo – Yr Athrofa Learning Partnership celebrates the work of students in an online conference**
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> In May 2021, 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.

> **Cameo – A podcast by tutors in the Cardiff Partnership supports students, tutors and mentors**
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> In 2018, two lecturers from the Cardiff Partnership began broadcasting a podcast for PGCE students which became 'Emma and Tom talk teaching'.  The podcast has become particularly relevant during the pandemic, when many students and partnership staff turned increasingly to online materials to support their practice.  Each episode includes a main discussion (often with one or more guests), and three regular slots on 'wellbeing', 'something interesting' and 'something to try'.  The podcasts cover a variety of helpful topics related to teaching, supporting wellbeing, and sharing effective practice.  Episodes have included items such as developing resilience or a recording of a question and answer session about the Curriculum for Wales with representatives from the consortia and Welsh Government.  Lecturers, partnership school staff and students have featured as guests talking about their own practice and their research.  In this way, the podcast supports the development of a community of practice in ITE.

Most of the students we talked to recognised that this year had, at times, been exceptionally challenging in terms of their wellbeing.  Students told us about the

valuable support that had been provided by their university tutors.  This was especially true in the few cases where students had the opportunity to work closely face-to-face in university at the beginning of their programmes and had opportunities to develop strong working relationships.  All students reported that they had benefited from university support systems to 'check in' with students regularly through virtual meetings, although a few thought that these opportunities might have been more plentiful.  A few of the student representatives we spoke to told us about concerns that had been brought to their attention over the year about students who had felt isolated.  This was especially the case where students were having difficulties in their school experiences, had not developed positive relationships with their mentors and had felt as if they did not know their university tutors well enough to contact them with their worries.

Many students valued the connections that they made with their peers on their programmes.  They used social media and virtual meetings to create networks of support to help one another in coping with aspects of the programmes, such as issues with assignments, ideas for school experience and sharing their experiences of applying for teaching posts.

In the autumn term when many students were studying remotely, they reported that they were able to manage their workload effectively.  A few students, particularly those with caring responsibilities or young children found it difficult to study at home.  In some respects, the beginning of the programmes, especially PGCEs, were less pressured than would usually be the case.  It was not until the spring term that students had to hone their time management skills to cope with the demands of planning for school at the same time as completing assignments.  Some students reported that they found the second half of their programme more stressful because they were juggling assignments and lesson planning.

In the most effective cases, partnerships organised support sessions for students, for example on mental health, or brought students together where there were common worries.  Many partnerships devised new ways to support students' wellbeing.  For example, the CaBan partnership introduced 'Amser panad' drop-in sessions for students to stay in touch by talking to each other through the virtual learning environment.  Other partnerships have made good use of the support services already in place in the university, for example, in the University of South Wales partnership where students were able to access the Students' Union's 'Pet-a-pooch' days which help students relieve stress.

# Teaching and learning experiences

## The taught programme.

In all partnerships, universities, lead schools and other partners have collaborated to co-construct the programmes. However, 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 'front-load' them with academic and theoretical study. Lead schools played a key part in the review of programmes, and this has helped to ensure that all partners are able to support students during the COVID-19 crisis.

Partnerships delivered a combination of live (virtual), pre-recorded and asynchronous sessions. Many students preferred the live teaching sessions because they felt more engaged in the learning, especially when these were recorded for students to play back later. Students particularly liked the way partnership staff used facilities such as break-out rooms to facilitate small group discussion.

Tutors and mentors who delivered online sessions were keen to make sessions as interactive as possible for students. They experimented with different approaches and this helped to model effective practice for the students. Partnership staff found that working remotely had benefits for integrating school and university elements of the taught programme because of the flexibility these approaches afforded. Staff in lead schools recorded sessions for the programme, or 'dropped into' lectures and seminars led by university staff. A few staff maximised the opportunities of lockdown imaginatively, for example, by involving their own children when demonstrating teaching strategies. Students valued highly the creative approaches taken by their tutors and mentors to overcome the challenges of the pandemic.

Partnership staff and students also took advantage of remote working by accessing educational events that would normally be too distant or expensive to attend in person. Students attended a variety of virtual events that enriched their learning, such as meetings of professional societies and the World Education Summit.

Many partnerships developed their programmes to include content on approaches to digital learning and teaching. Taught sessions included explorations of digital learning platforms and the ways that these may be used creatively in planning lessons. In the most effective cases, students gained an understanding of the digital pedagogies. This meant that they were not just using digital resources as 'gimmicks' or to hold pupils' attention, but were developing their knowledge, skills and understanding to plan and teach activities that help pupils to make progress in their learning. In the best examples, students were able to relate and compare their own learning to school practice.

**Cameo – The University of South Wales Partnership develops 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.

**Cameo – Yr Athrofa Learning Partnership has taken a considered approach to developing digital learning and teaching**

At the beginning of the pandemic, partnership leaders established the Digital Learning Working Party. They recognised that staff had a variety of experiences and competencies with digital learning and teaching and organised training for them. The working party supported the initial development of asynchronous learning sessions for students.

Following feedback from students and the sharing of effective practice, the partnership reorganised learning for the autumn term to provide a balance of synchronous and asynchronous sessions to suit the necessary redesign of the programme. The working party considered the move from the student as learner to the student as teacher. From the autumn term onwards, the partnership offered 'safe rehearsal spaces' for staff to experiment with their approaches to remote teaching.

In the spring term, partnership schools and the consortium shared case studies of effective practice in online learning and teaching. Partners and students were invited to share their views on the developments in the programmes.

The partnership has reviewed their approaches to digital learning and teaching and in the light of feedback from students and partners is planning to retain aspects of this work in future iterations of the ITE programmes.

**Connecting theory and practice**

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 in a real space 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'. This helped students to build their confidence and their repertoire of approaches in a supportive environment.

Partnerships altered the schedule, content and form of assignments to best fit the amended programmes. This was an important consideration on PGCE programmes where students have a limited time in which to engage in research and inquiry. In the most effective examples, assignments enabled students to make links between their reading and their school experiences. In the Swansea University Partnership, to maximise opportunities to connect research and practice, students' assignments were based on their school experience in focused areas such as behaviour management or lesson planning. Shorter and sharply-defined tasks relating theory and practice enabled students to consider the research linked to their everyday school activities.

Many partnerships redesigned their major research assignment on their PGCE programmes so that students explored research methods such as defining an area for inquiry, conducting a review of relevant literature and planning research approaches without undertaking the inquiry in school. Although this was not an ideal

approach, it helped students to gain an understanding about how research shapes school practice, and was a particularly effective alternative where mentors and partnership staff in school supported students to make their theoretical study meaningful by providing opportunities for students to share their ideas with staff in the school.  Students also reported that gained more from the development of their research skills when there were structured opportunities to discuss their research approaches in groups with their peers and partnership staff in online discussion sessions.

**Cameo – Students in the Cardiff Partnership 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.

In a few instances, students felt disadvantaged because they were unable to collect evidence for their assignments in school.  In some cases, this was because schools did not understand the requirements of these tasks.

In some schools, students have 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.

**The school-based programme**

All partnerships benefit from their effective lead school partners.  All lead schools, staff have maintained their commitment to co-delivery of the programmes throughout the period of the pandemic.  In the autumn term, lead schools in many partnerships provided remote learning to cover their aspects of delivery.  In the best examples, the lead school components of the programmes supported students to reflect on their university sessions and their reading to explore pedagogy and practice in the lead school's context.   Lead school practitioners reported that teaching the school-led programme had a positive impact on the whole school's approach to research and inquiry during the pandemic.  It provided a positive focus for the school and maintained a sense of continuity.

**Developing students' understanding of the Curriculum for Wales**

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. Many lead schools have been involved with curriculum reform as pioneer and innovation 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 are preparing for the curriculum have been limited this year, particularly in secondary schools. In the best cases, especially in primary schools, staff have encouraged students to develop innovative plans, and students have experienced how schools are approaching curriculum reform in different contexts.

Overall, partnerships do not have a clear enough picture of where schools are in their journey towards implementation of the curriculum. As a result, particularly with the difficulties of this year, partnership have not been able to plan for students to see effective practice at first hand. In addition, approaches to developing students' understanding of curriculum design and development is too variable across all programmes.

**Developing students understanding of teaching pupils with additional learning needs**

The restrictions of COVID-19 have also constrained partnerships' ability to ensure that students develop their awareness of other aspects of school practice, such as developing an understanding of teaching pupils with additional learning needs (ALN). Although this is covered in taught programme in school and university, students noted that they feel that they would have benefited from seeing good practice in teaching pupils with ALN. A few students reported that a positive aspect of training during the pandemic was that they had experience in the 'hub' provision that was set up by some local authorities. This had enabled these students to work with vulnerable pupils, including those with ALN, and to have valuable conversations with staff about how to support these pupils. However, students also told us that they had very variable experiences of schools' approaches to teaching pupils with ALN. Some schools created opportunities for students to work with groups of pupils with

ALN, other schools did not even make students aware of those ALN pupils who were in the classes they taught.

**School experience**

Students were very thankful for the opportunities they had to teach, albeit that many of them had to wait until several months into their programme before they were able to go into school.  They recognised the difficulties that schools had in accommodating students on their school experience, such as organising their teaching for 'bubbles' of pupils, or working within a restricted space.  They were grateful for the time given to them by their mentors during such as challenging time.

The lead schools, having been closely involved in planning the programmes, supported students well.  Experiences for students in the wider network of schools were more variable.  Students noted that some mentors did not seem to have a good enough understanding of the requirements of the programme.  This included, expectations about planning and teaching, support for completing assignments, and finding opportunities for students to learn from a range of practitioners.  A few students found the transition from one placement to the next challenging because of the differences in approach to their support.

**Assessment against the standards**

All programmes have processes to assess students' trajectory towards Qualified Teacher Status (QTS).  All partnership staff have an understanding of 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.
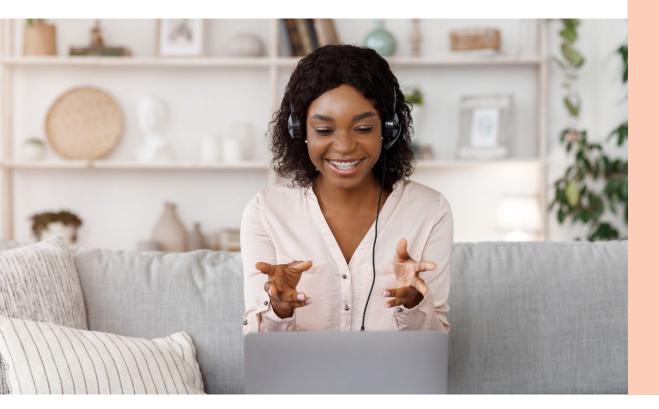
Each partnership has taken a different approach to the practice of assessing students against the standards this year.  Some partnerships have focused on key standards, or have differentiated the standards to monitor students' progress at various points in the year.  Others have assessed students across all the standards, but asked tutors and mentors to do this within the limitations of the students' experiences.

A few students reported that they were supported well by a professional tutor, especially designated to support with collecting evidence against the standards and compiling the Professional Learning Passport (PLP).  Overall, students have found the process of submitting evidence challenging.  They have found it difficult to identify relevant evidence, particularly against standards where they feel that they have too little experience.  This was not helped by the variation in advice and support provided by tutors and mentors, for example about what constitutes sound evidence, or how many pieces of evidence are required.  Where students had to collect evidence against all the standards, they struggled with evidence for some areas, for example collaboration and leadership.

# Leadership and management

**It has been challenging to establish the new partnerships at a time of enormous uncertainty. 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.**

Partnerships demonstrate a strong commitment to collaboration, and working relationships are maturing.  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 welcomed the clear and timely advice and guidance from the Welsh Government that has supported the necessary refocusing of the programmes.

**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.  For example, partnerships are collaborating to research into the impact of COVID-19 on aspects of education in Wales..**

**Cameo – The CaBan partnership is using research to develop approaches to the assessment of student teachers**

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 beginning 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.

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

All partnerships have found value in meeting virtually and this has benefited the development of the partnership. Some partnership staff reported that communication has been strengthened through the necessity of finding solutions to the challenges of the pandemic. This year, many partnerships leaders have noted that more regular, virtual meetings have afforded more opportunities for conversation, and this has strengthened the spirit of collegiality and mutual support throughout the crisis. However, in some instances, communications between partnership leaders and the wider network of schools has not been effective in ensuring that key messages are shared, for example about the assessment of students on school experience.

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.