An exploration of the 'lived' experiences of newly qualified teachers, with a specific focus on mentoring, as they undergo the mandatory induction year during the global Covid-19 pandemic.

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Abstract

This longitudinal, qualitative study explored experiences of nine newly qualified teachers (NQTs) during their mandatory induction period with a particular focus on their experiences of being mentored. The complex context these teachers were working in included the onset of the global Covid-19 pandemic, an extensive and ambitious education reform agenda in Wales and cultures of scrutiny and accountability. Data were collected through in-depth, semi-structured interviews and analysed adopting a reflexive thematic approach.

Findings indicate that the pandemic significantly diminished these NQTs' opportunities for teaching experience and professional learning during Initial Teacher Education (ITE) and induction. The pandemic magnified the well-documented challenges experienced by NQTs, and the reality shock that many NQTs experience, yet mentoring support was significantly compromised. Temporary policy amendments to mitigate for these diminished experiences reduced induction requirements, rather than resourcing the extra support that these NQTs required. NQTs' experiences of being mentored during their NQT year were highly variable and their understanding of the induction mentor role lacked clarity. Mentoring to support professional formation was largely inadequate, with minimal evidence of educative approaches. Evidencing the Professional Learning Passport (PLP) dominated mentor meetings, with mentors predominantly adopting instrumental approaches that compromised opportunities for NQTs to engage in authentic professional learning through critical discussions about their teaching practice.

This study suggests educational stakeholders in Wales need to critically consider the nature and quality of mentoring provision for NQTs, to support critical engagement with their practice and the facilitation of professional learning essential for the advancement of their professional development and expertise. A clear consensus of the purpose of mentoring NQTs should be established with professional learning support and guidance on educative approaches to support NQTs in becoming the reflective, inquiring and collaborative professionals that Welsh education policy aspires to have.

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List of Abbreviations

Acronym	Term
AB	Awarding Body
AoLE	Areas of Learning and Experience
BERA	British Educational Research Association
DT	Design and Technology
ECSP	Early Career Support Package
EV	External Verifier
EWC	Education Workforce Council
GERM	Global Education Reform Movement
HOD	Head of Department
HT	Headteacher
IM	Induction Mentor
ITE	Initial Teacher Education
LA	Local Authority
MEP	Masters in Educational Practice
MFL	Modern Foreign Languages
NAPL	National Approach to Professional Learning
NFER	National Foundation for Educational Research
NQT	Newly Qualified Teacher
OECD	The Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
PE	Physical Education
PISA	Programme for International Student Assessment
PLP	Professional Learning Passport
PTE	Practical Teaching Experience
QTS	Qualified Teacher Status
RE	Religious Education
RQ	Research Question
SOL	Scheme of Learning
SLO	Schools as Learning Organisations
SLT	Senior Leadership Team
TA	Teaching Assistant
TLR	Teaching and Learning Responsibility
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
WG	Welsh Government

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Chapter One: Introduction

1.1 Motivation for the Study

My early experiences within the teaching profession may be aptly encapsulated in the words of Charles Dickens: "It was the best of times, it was the worst of times". Induction into the profession as an NQT was both daunting and inspirational, simultaneously a time of growth and opportunities, along with uncertainty and self-doubt. I believe it was a definitive time in shaping my professional identity and directing the course of my career, and access to mentoring support was vital in steering me through the highs and lows whilst ensuring that I continued to develop professionally.

My mentoring experiences as an NQT were a marked contrast to some of my experiences as a trainee teacher during ITE where, on occasions, managing the mentor was the biggest challenge I faced. Feedback could be overly critical, often resulting in me mirroring the mentor's teaching practice in order to be considered responsive to feedback following observation; it invariably focused on what I couldn't do well, rather than what I could. This enactment of mentoring, a practice which I now understand to be a form of "judgementoring" (Hobson and Malderez 2013, p. 2), created tensions in my developing sense of professional identity and was ultimately detrimental to my well-being.

Throughout my teaching career, I have subsequently experienced the counter perspective of the mentor's role in numerous capacities: as a mentor of trainee teachers at class, subject and senior mentor level, as well as a mentor of NQTs as both an induction mentor (IM) and external verifier (EV). Commensurate with my experiences as a mentee, the mentoring role holds its own tensions and contrasts. As a mentor, the privilege of guiding and supporting NQTs has been matched with a sense of being ill-prepared for the role, grappling my way through protocols and policies, with little appreciation of the nuances of effective mentoring. Attempting to mediate the dual roles of assessor and mentor was confusing; my aspiration to be a confidante to my mentees was compromised by my role of judging whether the professional standards had been sufficiently met in order for me to recommend a mentee passed their induction year.

In my current role as a teacher educator, I continue to witness the frequently turbulent nature of the student teacher experience and the profound impact that mentors may have, both good and bad. It has made me curious as to why such discrepancies in mentoring seem to persist and has inspired me to go back to the start of my own teaching career and consider what it was about the mentoring support I received as an NQT that effectively guided me through this critical phase in my teaching career.

Following qualification as a teacher of secondary school English, I commenced employment in a comprehensive school in South Wales in 2012. In addition to the allocation of an experienced induction mentor, as stipulated in government guidelines for induction, the offer of further professional development in the form of the newly accredited, part-time Masters in Educational Practice (MEP) was also presented, commencing in January 2013. Despite my enthusiasm for learning, I held genuine reservations about undergoing further study at this early point in my career; I had just survived a gruelling ITE year and was keen to get on with the business of teaching and learning, developing my 'craft' through hours of experience in the classroom. However, the appeal of a programme that was fully funded and the potential to continue to collaborate with some of my peers from the PGCE prevailed. A key element of the programme was that I would receive support from an external mentor for the duration of my studies. Thus, in addition to the day-to-day support I received from my school induction mentor, there were opportunities to collaborate with an experienced teaching practitioner external to my context, specifically about professional learning and research-informed, inquiry-based practice. The deliberate positioning of the mentor as external was intended to counteract "assimilationist and survivalist discourses" (Penikett, Daly and Milton 2019, p. 406) apparent within some mentoring practices (Achinstein and Athanases 2006, Hobson and McIntyre 2013) and facilitate the conditions necessary for "risky talk" (Eraut 2000, cited in Penikett, Daly and Milton 2019, p. 406). Both types of mentoring experiences during my NQT year were positive and valuable modes of support, although the foci of each were markedly different. The school-based mentor ensured that the requirements of induction were conducted in accordance with induction guidance (Welsh Government (WG) 2012), throughout the one-year induction period. This

included the termly lesson observations and feedback, setting targets and the necessary administration to evidence my meeting the professional standards. Importantly, it felt like she 'had my back' in negotiating day-to-day school life, acting as an advocate in securing resources for me and ensuring I was treated fairly. The benefits of this should not be underestimated. As an NQT wishing to be accepted within my school community and avoid conflict, I often lacked the confidence or the inclination to stand up for myself.

Support from the external mentor, allocated to me through my three-year participation on the MEP programme, was firmly rooted in interrogating my practice, linking and applying theory explored within the module content and how it applied in practice. The programme was constructed on the premise of teacher inquiry and "critical professionalism" as opposed to following pre-conceived strategies and techniques (Connolly et al. 2018, p. 243). The external mentor was fundamental in supporting my professional learning. She provided a safe space to scrutinise my practice as a co-researcher. The mentoring experiences empowered me and developed my confidence in trialling strategies and making changes in my classroom practice. It formed a refreshing counterbalance to some of the experiences of trying to fit in and be accepted into the school community and prevented me from passively accepting established school cultures (Connolly et al. 2018).

I now appreciate that my experiences during the induction year were unusual and probably not fully appreciated by myself at the time. On reflection, it has raised the question of how similar my experiences of mentoring, as an NQT, were to my peers, regardless of whether they opted into the MEP or not. In hindsight, I would argue that collaboration with an external mentor, assigned to me as part of the MEP, supported me in developing an enduring disposition to continually question my teaching practice and develop as an inquiring practitioner. Although unfamiliar with the terminology at the time, I now appreciate the "educative" stance to mentoring that I experienced (Feiman-Nemser 1998, p. 66), where my mentor adopted the role of co-learner in "problematising" practice (Talbot 2016, p. 87) through critical dialogue (Feiman-Nemser 1998; Stanulis et al. 2019).
Such mentoring experiences hold particular significance within the current political context in Wales, which is in the thick of a sustained reform agenda that seeks an ambitious

reconfiguration of its education system. At the dawn of an aspirational new curriculum, it is increasingly recognised that the realisation of such an endeavour will require excellent teachers whose practice is firmly embedded in the "'why' and 'how' of teaching as well as the 'what'," (Furlong 2015, p. 7). Such political aspirations hold significance for NQTs, undergoing a vital year in their professional formation, and the types of mentoring experiences that are considered most conducive to supporting them in adopting an inquiry stance as an integral part of their teaching practice. It may suggest a need for mentoring that prioritises the facilitation of an NQT's critical interrogation of their teaching practice. Current policy in Wales states that NQTs are entitled to an induction mentor within the school context to provide support throughout the induction period, with additional periodic support from an EV employed by the Education Workforce Council (EWC). The document 'Induction for newly qualified teachers in Wales 2017' offers guidance regarding legal requirements and the entitlement of NQTs to "high quality support" (WG 2017a, p. 7), but what this might look like in practice remains ill-defined.

This is further exacerbated as the concept of mentoring and what it entails remains contested (Kemmis et al. 2014, p. 154), resulting in diverse perceptions and understandings of what the role should involve in practice. This holds significant and far-reaching implications for NQTs who may experience disparate interpretations and enactments of what should be "high quality support" (WG 2017a, p. 7), which ultimately creates an inequitable experience for some. Indeed, according to Professor Mick Waters' review of processes and policies relating to induction in Wales, despite good intentions aimed at achieving a greater degree of consistency, complexities inherent in the education system make this impossible; he concludes that "the only consistencies in the actual experience of NQTs are variability and inconsistencies." (Waters 2020, p. 11).

1.2 The Problem Statement

It is widely acknowledged, both nationally and internationally, that the early career experiences of teachers can have a profound and lasting impact on personal and professional development, as well as their continued commitment to the profession (Gallant and Riley 2014; Schuck et al. 2018). Furthermore, there is an increasing research base that

indicates the potential impact, both positive and negative, of mentoring experiences on NQTs as they orientate themselves into a new profession and often unfamiliar school contexts (Hobson et al. 2009).

The focus of my study originated from reflecting upon both my own experiences as an NQT and the current volatile political context in Wales. If, as research claims, the induction period is fraught with challenges under normal circumstances (Glazzard and Coverdale 2018; Schuck et al. 2018), what might the experiences of NQTs look like during the period of substantial and rapid policy reform we are currently undergoing in Wales (WG 2017b)? However, as I refined the focus of my research in 2019, fine tuning my research questions to elicit the data I was seeking, I could not have anticipated that the global pandemic, Covid-19, was on the near horizon. The NQTs who would be participants in my study, subsequently recognised by some to be the 'covid cohort', would be faced with further significant trials as the Welsh education system endeavoured to respond to the unprecedented challenges that the pandemic presented. Thus, in addition to investigating the implications of the shifting policy agenda in Wales, it became imperative to explore how this cohort of NQTs experienced the added turbulence of a global pandemic and what the lasting implications of this might be.

1.3 Structure of the Thesis

This chapter has briefly outlined my personal motivation for the focus of this study and its significance in the current education reform agenda in Wales, during a global pandemic. The remainder of the thesis is organised into five further chapters. Chapter 2 explores national and international literature on issues surrounding the experiences of NQTs as they transition from ITE and through their induction year. It pays particular attention to NQTs' experiences of mentoring, including how mentoring might be enacted to support professional learning during a period of prolific educational policy reform in Wales. It further examines the potential impact of Covid-19 on the experiences of NQTs during a career phase that is already regarded as difficult. Chapter 3 provides a description of the epistemological and ontological perspectives of this study, as well as the rationale underpinning the qualitative approach to the research methodology, including ethical

considerations. It describes research methods and approaches adopted in synthesising and analysing the data generated from four rounds of in-depth semi-structured interviews. Finally, it explores the implications of the researcher's positionality within the study. Chapter 4 details the findings from the qualitative data that emanated from the in-depth interviews and discusses them within the framework of current national and international research on experiences of NQTs during induction, and with regard to the potential impact that Covid-19 might add to those experiences. Chapter 5 consolidates the key findings and reflects upon how the data responds to the research questions posed. Chapter 6 draws conclusions from the findings and poses recommendations for future consideration.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1 The Welsh Education Policy and Context

Wales is a relatively small, yet culturally distinct country, with a population of approximately 3.1 million people (Office for National Statistics 2022). Although it remains a constituent part of the United Kingdom, following devolution in 1999, responsibility for education policy shifted from the UK Parliament to Senedd Cymru. There are currently 1,473 state-maintained schools in Wales, offering a range of Welsh medium, English medium, and bilingual provision (WG 2021). There are presently 35,256 schoolteachers registered in Wales, of which NQTs comprise approximately 3% (EWC 2022). Despite a reported decline of 10.4% in the number of teachers registered with the EWC over the previous decade (EWC 2021), more recent data indicates an increase of 1.4% in the number of teachers, the first year on year increase since 2011 (EWC 2022).

Post-devolution, the Welsh education system has undergone a plethora of policy reforms aimed at improving education standards for all learners in state-maintained schools. This move to locate responsibility of education policy to Wales has resulted in the adoption of policies increasingly bespoke to the Welsh context, and divergent from education policy in other UK countries, particularly England. Wales' poor comparative performances in the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) tests of 2009 and 2015 have arguably acted as a key catalyst in identifying that Wales' evident commitment to raising standards has not been matched by its realisation (Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) 2017). Recent PISA data appeared to be more promising, with average scores for all subjects not demonstrating significant difference to other OECD countries for the first time (Sizmur et al. 2019). However, the OECD average has dropped in all aspects since 2015 (Dauncey 2021), rendering Wales' apparent improvement statistically insignificant (Dauncey 2021), and continuing to lag behind the other UK nations, most notably England (PISA 2018). Thus, the potential for significant improvement remains (WG 2019).

The Welsh education system is currently undergoing a sustained and extensive reform journey which arguably represents a marked shift in policy orientation from multiple "short-term" initiatives lacking in synergy, to a "longer-term vision" of an education system (OECD 2017, p. 7), intended to be co-constructed by stakeholders (WG 2017b). Such reforms are embodied in the 'National Mission' which places education centre-stage in securing the nation's "economic prosperity, social cohesion and well-being" (WG 2017b, p. 3). The "transformational" new curriculum is identified as the "cornerstone" of realising a new vision for education (WG 2017b, p. 17) and an emphasis on developing a high-quality teaching profession foregrounds teachers as fundamental to its achievement. Importantly, new entrants to the teaching profession are considered a "significant part of the future success of Welsh education" (Waters et al. 2018, p. 34). Thus, the development of new teachers has been acknowledged as a priority within the broader reforms in school improvement, teacher education and professional learning (Milton et al. 2020).

Significantly, these educational policy aspirations have been fundamentally impacted by the current global Covid-19 pandemic which has necessitated a monumental shift in educational practices (Pokhrel and Chhetri 2021). In addition, the professional learning needs of teachers are likely to be even more acute given the necessity to adapt to uncertain and often rapidly changing contexts (Adahi et al. 2021). Whilst this turbulent environment has undeniably been felt by all educators, the challenges faced by the 2020/21 cohort of NQTs may be more even more profound. As la Velle et al. (2020, p. 596) assert, this cohort is "uniquely different" in that their diminished teaching experiences during ITE, as a result of restrictions during the pandemic, undoubtedly necessitates extra support as they commence their induction year (Morgan et al. 2022).

2.2 An International Perspective

2.2.1 International Evidence on the Transition from ITE to NQT

International research indicates that transition from ITE and through to the mandatory one-year induction period is a complex and pivotal phase in the professional pathway for early career teachers (Wang et al. 2008; Hobson et al. 2009; Feiman-Nemser 2012; Langdon et al. 2014). The quality of experiences encountered during the first year of teaching can have a significant and sustained impact on both the personal and professional development of NQTs, and their capacity to consolidate and build upon skills and knowledge developed during ITE (Karlberg and Bezzina 2019). This stage presents a profound and ongoing period of personal identity development (Ingersoll and Smith 2004; Van der Wal et al. 2019), that can pose significant challenges for NQTs as they seek to establish what kind of teacher they aspire to be. In addition to developing their pedagogical knowledge and classroom practice, NQTs must also assimilate their own personal values and experiences within complex school cultures whose values may or may not align (Flores and Day 2006); it requires NQTs to negotiate the micro-politics of both formal organisational structures as well as the nuances of staffroom cultures (Schuck et al. 2018). Furthermore, this critical step in their professional development (Huberman 1989, cited in Flores and Day 2006) concurrently offers the potential to encounter personal and professional growth (Hong et al. 2018), or to be positioned in survival mode, when negotiating the 'reality shock' that may be experienced (Veenman 1984; Kane and Francis 2013; Heikkinen et al. 2018). This poses significant implications for both education policy that seeks to address the global problem of high attrition rates of early career teachers (Buchanan et al. 2013; Harfitt 2015; Keltchermans 2017), as well as teachers' potential career trajectories and long-term professional development (Ewing and Langley Smith 2003).

The myriad of potential challenges, both personal and contextual, faced by NQTs is well documented (Mansfield et al. 2014; Heikkinen et al. 2018), with initial problems frequently arising immediately following transition from ITE, at the beginning of induction. The first term of teaching, considered a "crucial" phase in the induction process (Haggarty and Postlethwaite 2012, p. 241), may be perceived as a period of optimism and heightened

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autonomy as the "full responsibility" of the teacher role is adopted (Ulvik and Langørgen 2012, p. 52). However, the disconnect between the "initial buoyant state of energy and enthusiasm" (Manuel 2003, p. 144) and the experience in reality of school life is well-documented (Schuck et al. 2018; Voss and Kunter 2020). The 'reality shock' that many beginning teachers experience has been attributed to diverse factors including an overly "abrupt" transition from ITE into the profession (Waters et al. 2018, p. 34), in addition to a longstanding discontinuity of experience between the two phases of the career pathway (Haggerty and Postlethwaite 2012; Hobson et al. 2007). Discrepancies between NQTs' expectations and the reality on entering the profession may render them feeling ill-prepared and potentially place them in "survival mode" (Thomas and Beauchamp 2010; Sunde and Ulvik 2014 p. 287). Whilst acknowledging the likely impact of school cultures and classroom experiences on moulding the identity of beginning teachers (Day et al. 2006), evidence suggests that they face many challenges that compromise this process (Fantilli and McDougall 2009; Correa et al. 2015; Milton et al. 2020).

In addition to the complexities of learning to teach (Feiman-Nemser 2012; Karlberg and Bezzina 2019), NQTs are required to navigate both immediate and remote contextual factors. For example, they are required to establish professional relationships (Beauchamp and Thomas 2009; Hong et al. 2018) within dynamic school systems that are complex and multi-faceted (Daly et al. 2020). Furthermore, they are required to navigate external factors, including complex and fluctuating policy agendas that may subject them to accountability pressures requiring them to evidence quantifiable performance outcomes (Buchanan 2015). The nature of experiences encountered by NQTs during this crucial period of acculturalisation may have a sustained impact on their emerging sense of professional identity (Hong et al. 2018), as well as their developing professional practice (Marent et al. 2020) and this reinforces the consensus of the need for appropriate support and guidance during this formative career phase (Darling-Hammond 2003; Kraft et al. 2018).

International research identifies the high levels of stress associated with the teaching profession (Johnson et al. 2005; Skaalvik and Skaalvik 2015; Newberry and Allsop 2017), a problem potentially greater for inexperienced teachers (Pillen et al. 2013; Burrow et al. 2020) who may be less equipped to deal with the level of "emotional labour" required in the

development of classroom practice (Nichols et al. 2017, p. 406). Furthermore, stress may be exacerbated as NQTs endeavour to manage a substantial workload, whilst attempting to balance tensions between a moral imperative to support high quality learning experiences, and the tendency to "bleed yourself dry" in order to do that (Burrow et al. 2020, p. 950). Additionally, prominent and persistent challenges reported in the literature include: behaviour management (Hudson 2012; Karlberg and Bezzina 2020); excessive workloads (Hobson et al. 2009; Kutsyuruba et al. 2019); the quality of working life (Ginnis et al. 2018) and that sometimes NQTs are given the most challenging classes (Ingersoll and Strong 2011; Smith et al. 2019). Lack of support from the wider school, particularly from leadership, can also be problematic for NQTs (Corbell et al. 2008; Grudnoff 2012; Milton et al. 2020). The impact of the global pandemic has served to intensify challenges for many NQTs, including increasing workload (Allen et al. 2020), and heightening stress levels that have impinged negatively upon mental health and wellbeing (Baker et al. 2021). However, Gordon (2020) suggests that high quality mentoring may play a significant role in nurturing NQTs through these challenges as well as facilitating sustained professional learning opportunities that may ultimately inspire novice teachers to remain committed to the profession (Langdon et al. 2019).

Undeniably, experiencing challenges and tensions can potentially contribute in a positive way to the development of professional identity, offering new perspectives and ways of developing practice (Smagorinsky et al. 2004; van der Wal et al. 2019). However, when experienced excessively, challenge may compromise a teacher's sense of self-efficacy in the role, leading to and compounding symptoms of burnout that may ultimately result in them exiting the profession (Betoret 2009; Collie et al. 2012; Fernet et al. 2012; Klassen et al. 2013; Skaalvik and Skaalvik 2016).

2.2.2 The Importance of Quality Induction

Teacher induction programmes have been identified as a means for developing the pedagogical skills of new teachers, in addition to improving job satisfaction and retention in the profession (Smith and Ingersoll 2004; Hobson et al. 2009; Ingersoll and Strong 2011; Carmel and Badash 2018).

Totterdell et al. (2008) identify induction as a distinct phase, one year, in a teacher's development, that involves navigating acclimatisation into both the profession (Kutsyuruba and Godden 2019) and specific school settings (Glazzard and Coverdale 2018). However, induction programmes, as an overarching means of support, may vary in both content and duration, as well as degrees of formality (Kyutsyubura et al. 2019). Elements identified as being important in terms of induction programmes include managing workload, classroom management, acculturalisation into school contexts and professional development (Harmsen et al. 2019). Inevitably, variations in induction programmes, regarding their purpose, may result in variations in the type of support beginning teachers receive (Ingersoll and Smith 2004; Davis and Higdon 2008). For example, Early Career Framework reforms in England have involved extending the statutory induction period from one year to two years (Gov.UK 2021). Induction arrangements in Wales, however, maintain a minimum mandatory requirement of one year, with no further time limit imposed; induction being deemed complete, once the professional standards have been satisfactorily evidenced (WG 2017a).

Induction programmes are widely recognised as serving to simultaneously support new teachers in their professional development needs, whilst monitoring and assessing progress, often against an agreed set of standards (WG 2017c; Gov.UK 2021), although interpretations and understandings of these processes may vary and evolve over time (Serpell 2000). The quality of induction has been identified as a significant factor in sustaining a novice teacher's "morale" (Totterdell et al. 2008, p. 8), in addition to their self-efficacy and professional commitment (Haggarty and Postlethwaite 2012). However, the transition between ITE and induction has also been identified as being problematic (Hobson et al. 2007; Whitfield 2019; Waters 2020). Gordon (2020) suggests that the well-documented plateau or dip in academic performance at transition points for school pupils (Galton et al. 2003) might also hold true for NQTs, with transition focussing on administrative factors rather than bespoke professional development needs (Gordon 2020). Furthermore, research surrounding formal systems of support during induction, despite being limited, indicates a failure to build upon what has been learnt during ITE (Harrison 2002; Waters 2020), and can favour a "deficit model" (Harrison, 2002; Haggarty and Postlethwaite 2012, p. 244) rather that supporting the development of pedagogy in the classroom (Glazzard and Coverdale 2018).

Although there are many aspects of induction programmes that can impact upon the experiences of NQTs (Hobson et al. 2009), mentoring has been widely acknowledged as potentially the most effective form of support for professional development (Marable and Raimondi 2017), having a positive impact upon an NQT's sense of efficacy, job satisfaction, and well-being (Buchanan et al. 2013; Aspfors and Fransson 2015; Spooner-Lane 2017). However, there is a persistently limited consensus regarding understandings and definitions of the mentor role, and this may contribute to the continued variability in the quality, consistency and enactment of mentoring provision (Heikinnen et al. 2018). Furthermore, acknowledging that effective mentoring support holds the potential to enhance a new teacher's sense of job satisfaction, such inconsistencies in mentoring provision may be detrimental to some NQTs' continued commitment to, and retention in, the profession (Lipton and Wellman 2018).

Teacher retention continues to be a global concern in education policy (Keltchermans 2017; Sims and Allen 2018), being detrimental in both monetary terms and in the discontinuity of teaching provision that high levels of attrition may present (Trevethan 2018). More importantly, teacher attrition ultimately impacts negatively upon on pupils' learning experiences and outcomes (Fantilli and McDougall 2009; Burke et al. 2015; Gallant and Riley 2017; Newbury and Allsop 2017). Internationally, it has increasingly been acknowledged that providing all teachers, including early career teachers, with appropriate learning opportunities that promote a sense of agency and develop skills and competency in teaching practice are vital in both retaining teachers in the profession (Day and Gu 2010; Gu and Day 2013) and supporting effective practice (Little 2012; Mockler 2022). Indeed, the construction and assimilation of professional knowledge through professional learning may be considered an essential ingredient in becoming and staying a teacher (McCormack et al. 2006).

2.2.3 The importance of professional learning and development for newly qualified teachers

The induction year has been described as an "intense and formative time in learning to teach" where NQTs are required to adopt the dual roles of teaching and learning to teach (Feiman-Nemser 2001, p. 1026). However, as previously indicated, studies suggest a

disconnect between what has been learnt during ITE and induction, with missed opportunities for schools to support NQTs to consolidate experiences of ITE (Achinstein 2006; Haggarty et al. 2011). Hobson et al. (2009) argue that induction mentors may need greater familiarity with NQTs' experiences and accomplishments during ITE and this may help avoid repetition of professional learning experiences reported in the literature (Waters 2020).

The global issue of teacher retention has forced attention onto potential ways of sustaining new teachers' commitment to the profession, establishing a clear consensus that prolonged learning opportunities and improved conditions are vital in supporting the needs of new teachers and improving the quality of their teaching practice (Sutcher et al. 2016; Cater 2017), a key factor in improving pupils' learning and attainment (OECD 2005; Hargreaves and Fullan 2012). Attrition rates are notably high amongst beginning teachers (Schaefer 2013, Schaefer et al. 2014; Harfitt 2015) and continue to rise (Sims and Allen 2018) and studies suggest that facilitating engagement with authentic professional learning opportunities may mitigate this (Gallant and Riley 2017) and rejuvenate teachers professionally (Little 2012; Gore and Bowe 2013).

Given that research consistently demonstrates the centrality of the quality of teaching in improving pupils' learning and attainment (Chetty et al. 2014; Burroughs et al. 2019), it is reasonable to suggest that schools should prioritise the facilitation of appropriate learning opportunities for NQTs to support them in making a significant positive and sustained impact on the education system (Waters et al. 2018). However, it should be acknowledged that definitions of the concept of what 'quality' teaching might look like remain contested (OECD 2005; Coe et al. 2014). Equally, the concept of 'appropriate learning' is ambiguous. Optimistically, the term might imply a bespoke process, catering to specific and individual learning requirements of NQTs. This might be significant because research suggests that novice teachers might have distinct needs with regard to what they need to learn and why, based on their current knowledge and experience (Louws et al. 2017). Louws et al. (2017) further assert, albeit not specific to new teacher learning, that school approaches to formal professional learning programmes are frequently not learner centric, with teachers having limited input regarding content.

Concepts of professional development and professional learning have been described as "slippery" (Mockler 2022, p. 169), often being used interchangeably (Groundwater-Smith and Mockler 2009). Arguably, the emphasis within the professional development of teachers has been on a more formal, "one size fits all" approach (Mockler 2022, p. 169), often focussed on what teachers need to do, rather than on how pupils need to learn (Jones 2015). Increasingly, studies suggest that such one-off, generic approaches to professional learning fail to capture the idea of teachers as active learners, pursuing knowledge in order to challenge assumptions and generate new understandings of pedagogy (Easton 2008; Timperley 2011; Darling-Hammond et al. 2017), which may ultimately have a positive impact on pupils' learning (Jones 2015). In contrast, professional learning has been used to refer to more dynamic, collaborative and inquiry-based approaches (Mockler 2022); the interconnected relationship between the teacher as learner and the pupils' learning experience lies at the heart of professional learning which foregrounds critical engagement with teaching practice in order to transform it (Easton 2008; Timperley et al. 2007; Darling-Hammond et al. 2017). Conflating the concepts of learning and development is problematic in that professional learning may merely be viewed as an aspect of professional development; Opfer and Pedder (2011, p. 378) suggest this can undermine the "complex system" of teacher learning by viewing it as a one-off event. Mockler (2022) builds on this suggesting that professional learning may be presumed to be a consequence of professional development, but this is not a given.

International policy currently places an increased emphasis on the concept of professional learning, as a discrete term, rather than professional development (Jones 2015; Mockler 2022). This shift in semantics marks an adjustment in the ways that we think and reflect upon teaching and learning (Jones 2015), departing from professional learning as something that is delivered to teachers, frequently as isolated events (Timperley 2011), to an appreciation of professional learning as an ongoing process that teachers actively engage with (Jones 2015). Easton (2008) identifies the significance of placing an emphasis on learning over development:

> "It is clearer today than ever that educators need to learn, and that's why professional learning has replaced professional development. Developing is not enough. Educators must be knowledgeable and wise. They must know enough in

order to change. They must change in order to get different results. They must

become learners …" (Easton 2008, p. 756)

Changes in our understandings of the ways in which practice knowledge is created (Langdon 2011; Timperley 2011; Salm and Mulholland 2015) have supported the need for a shift in thinking about how professional learning is facilitated for NQTs (Cochran-Smith and Lytle 1999). Research indicates that effective professional learning is a long-term process (Keay et al. 2019) that can be transformative in terms of teaching practice and pupil outcomes (Darling-Hammond et al. 2017; Keay et al. 2019). It is situated (Lave and Wenger 1991; Evans 2019; Keay et al. 2019), focussed on individual needs within a specific context, and involves active participation and collaboration with others (Darling-Hammond et al. 2017). Moreover, it is inquiry-based, involving reflection and critical engagement with professional practice (Mockler 2022) that promotes autonomy (Kennedy 2014) and challenges the status quo. This has precipitated a move away from stage theories of teacher learning, based on experience and competence, that have previously influenced induction and mentoring (Langdon 2011), towards a focus on "adaptive expertise", whereby teacher knowledge can improve pupil learning regardless of how long they have been teaching (Le Fevre et al. 2016, p. 317).

2.2.4 Professional Standards: a framework for professional learning

Professional standards are a fundamental aspect of the Global Education Reform Movement (Sahlberg 2011) and can be used as a vehicle for professional learning for teaching practitioners (Mockler 2022). However, the international trend to define teacher work through a set of standards (Adoniou and Gallagher 2017) has fuelled controversy as to their use as a means of "reprofessionalisation", improving both the status of the profession and the quality of teaching, or "deprofessionalisation", constraining teacher development by compelling them to evidence a narrow set of descriptors (Torrance and Forde 2016, p. 112). Whilst an agreed set of professional standards hold potential to scaffold professional learning, using a "common language" (Kennedy 2005, p. 242), studies suggest that teachers' engagement with them might be compromised if sufficient time and resources are not invested (Mockler 2022). Moreover, whilst the rhetoric of the professional standards may

indicate aspirations of transformational teaching, presented through concepts of 'quality' and '21st century learning', they have been heavily criticised for their inadequate appreciation of the nuances of teaching as a "complex, context-specific, political and moral endeavour" (Kennedy 2014, p. 241). Critics of standards-based professional development claim that they represent a "demanded" form of professionalism (Mockler 2022, p. 5) which emphasises behaviourist aspects of teacher professionalism - what teachers do - (Kennedy 2005; Evans 2011), to the detriment of collaborative, critical engagement with practice (Kennedy 2005) - how and why they do it (Evans 2011). The requirement of providing evidence to meet the standards also proves problematic, suggesting "accountability agendas" (Talbot 2016, p. 8) that may encourage a "dot point" approach to teaching practice and a subsequent "narrowing of practice" (Connell 2009, p. 220). Moreover, it diminishes the importance of context specific critical engagement with teaching practice which is pertinent to both the specific development needs of individual teachers and the learning needs of the pupils in their classroom (Opfer and Pedder 2011).

The way the standards are employed within a specific context has significant implications for the professional learning of the NQT and the role of the mentor may be central in mediating this. Generating 'evidence' purely for administrative purposes may reduce engagement with the professional standards to a mere "ticking of" exercise (Talbot 2016, p. 26) and compromise its capacity to provide powerful and authentic learning experiences (Talbot 2016). The mentor's appreciation of both the complexities of professional learning as a concept (Fraser et al. 2007), and an understanding of it in terms of the ways that NQTs engage with professional practice, is essential.

2.2.5 Mentoring: a core component of induction

There are multiple modes of support that can impact upon the experiences of NQTs, most notably: the school culture, the opportunity to form relationships and the ability to utilise experiences from ITE (Berry 2004; Langdon et al. 2014). However, it is widely recognised that induction programmes and effective mentoring are crucial in improving these experiences (Wexler 2019). It is important to draw a distinction between the concepts of induction and mentoring in order to resist the "conceptual confounding" of the two which may undermine the complexities and "multi-faceted nature" of induction processes

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(Langdon et al. 2014, p. 93); induction encompasses the whole system of policy, support and professional opportunities (Langdon et al. 2014) of which mentoring is a core component (Bullough 2012; Langdon et al. 2014; Shanks et al. 2014).

Mentoring can encompass multiple and diverse purposes and, when enacted well, can play a vital role in supporting both the pastoral and professional learning needs of NQTs (Barrera 2010). The mentor's role in supporting well-being (Hobson and Maxwell 2017) may be paramount to novice teachers who might feel "vulnerable" as they simultaneously negotiate new contexts whilst learning to teach (Shanks 2014, p. 14). Both formal and informal mentoring opportunities within school contexts can support the process of integration into new roles and contexts and enhance an appreciation of the micro-politics of the school culture (Keltchermans and Ballet 2002; Attard Tonna and Shanks 2017). School mentors may help to mitigate for the "cellular nature of schools" (Lortie 1975, p. 14), which may create feelings of isolation (Shuck et al. 2018), which can be problematic for NQTs (Simos 2013). Moreover, effective mentors may facilitate opportunities for new teachers to collaborate with the wider school network and beyond (Greene 2014), an important aspect of creating a sense of belonging, as well as enabling professional growth (Williams et al. 2010).

The perceptions of mentoring in education have shifted over time in line with "the evolving nature of society and the teaching profession within it" (Hargreaves and Fullan 2012, p. 52). Hargreaves and Fullan (2012) argue that the increasing challenges and complexities within the teaching profession necessitate a greater need for more purposeful mentoring support and sharing of good practice (Hargreaves and Fullan 2012), that moves beyond merely "cheerleading" (Stanulis et al. 2019, p. 567).

There is a growing appreciation of the role of the induction mentor in supporting NQTs in their professional development (Barrera 2010), in assisting them in building upon the knowledge and skills accrued during ITE and expanding their expertise through professional learning (Borman and Dowling 2008; Ingersoll and Strong 2011; Shanks 2017; Sims and Allen 2018; Milton et al. 2020). It is of significance that perspectives on education and concepts of teacher professionalism are shifting in a rapidly evolving world (Hargreaves and Fullan 2012), and a new appreciation of how teachers develop has emerged (Langdon 2011; Timperley 2011; Salm and Mulholland, 2015). This has influenced policy development

surrounding the mentoring of novice teachers (Langdon and Ward 2015) and seen a heightened awareness of the significance of mentoring based on co-construction and collaboration to develop teachers' knowledge of practice (Kemmis et al. 2014, cited in Langdon and Ward 2015). This approach, which assimilates both theory and practice (Cochran-Smith and Lytle 1999) has been increasingly acknowledged in mentoring practice (Langdon and Ward 2015; Kemmis et al. 2014).

2.2.6 Educative Mentoring

There is a growing appreciation of the role of the mentor in supporting new teachers to learn how to teach (Langdon and Ward 2015) and develop the dispositions and skills to critically and perpetually engage with their teaching practice (Stanulis and Bell 2017; Stanulis et al. 2019; Wexler 2019). Such approaches conceive mentoring through an educational lens (Feiman-Nemser 2012), foregrounding the "pedagogical relationship" between the mentor and mentee (Feiman-Nemser 2012, p. 241) in collaborating and learning together through interrogating their teaching practice (Talbot 2016; Stanulis et al. 2019). In adopting an "educative" stance (Feiman-Nemser 1998, p. 63) the mentor becomes co-learner with the mentee, using an inquiry approach that endeavours to problematise practice (Talbot 2016) through critical dialogue (Stanulis et al. 2019). Such enactments of mentoring may challenge "institutional norms", as they work to transform practice rather than perpetuate the status quo (Cochran-Smith and Lytle 2009; Stanulis and Brondyk, 2013, p. 31; Langdon and Ward 2015).

Norman and Feiman-Nemser (2005, p. 680) argue that this approach affords a more "robust" type of mentoring, presenting a bespoke form of professional development that responds to the NQT's unique and emerging needs, as well as the specific learning requirements of their students. Adopting an inquiry stance distinguishes this mode of mentoring from others that offer technical, day-to-day advice and emotional support. Undeniably, socio-emotional support is a fundamental aspect of mentoring NQTs as the induction period can be a time of enormous pressure and disenchantment (Huberman 1989; Gold 1996) and NQTs may be "vulnerable" (Shanks, 2014, p. 14) in their position at the "bottom of the pecking order" (Hobson 2009, p. 1). However, in isolation, solely socio-

emotional support may be inadequate in supporting the professional learning needs of an NQT (Stanulis et al. 2019).

The provision of pastoral support, including acculturalisation, has the potential to perpetuate and uphold established school cultures and the practices that they advocate (Achinstein and Athanases 2006). This may serve to discourage innovative practice (Malderez et al. 2007) because mentees, being new and inexperienced members of a school culture, may feel that they have neither the capacity nor sufficient experience to challenge established practice, choosing instead to adopt a "strategic silence" to avoid being judged (Langdon et al. 2019, p. 256) and primarily acting as "receivers" of school policy (Ball et al. 2011, p. 632). The necessity to be "seen to be good/doing good" (Blackmore 2004, p. 454) may be particularly pertinent for NQTs who are frequently placed on temporary contracts in their first year of teaching (Waters 2020). This precarious position may fuel a sense of what Hargreaves (1980, p. 142) terms "fundamental competence anxiety"' which can result in a tendency for NQTs to present inauthentic versions, or "fabrications" (Ball 2003, pp. 224-226) of themselves to avoid revealing gaps in knowledge and practice (Hobson and McIntyre 2013), which are, arguably, inevitable features of new and inexperienced teachers.

This presents a significant dilemma for mentors who function simultaneously as assistants and assessors of NQTs (Betteney et al. 2018). Such tensions pose the risk of promoting "judgementoring", an authoritative form of mentoring focussed on evaluation (Hobson and Malderez 2013, p. 1), which may be detrimental to both the professional development and well-being of novice teachers (Hobson and Malderez 2013). The conflicting roles arguably make "uncomfortable bedfellows" (Cullingford 2006, p. 2), posing an obstacle to establishing trusting mentor-mentee relationships – a fundamental aspect of effective mentoring (Hobson and McIntyre 2013). In order to 'survive' the induction year, NQTs may seek to avoid conflict with their induction mentor who has significant input in whether they have sufficiently met and evidenced the professional teaching standards in their teaching practice, effectively whether they have passed or failed the induction process. As asserted by Hansman (2003), the power afforded to mentors can be both beneficial or detrimental and it may be necessary for mentees to "learn how to manage mentor[s]" as much as vice versa (Maynard 2000, p. 17).

Although the benefits of mentoring support from external sources have been recognised in counteracting this dilemma (Hodkinson 2009; Hopkins 2013), the concept of external mentoring as a means of supporting teacher development remains largely ignored (Daly and Milton 2017). Engagement in authentic, critical dialogue about teaching has been identified as a salient feature of educative mentoring, but research suggests that there may be challenges in achieving this solely with in-school support (Daly et al. 2004; McIntyre and Hobson 2015), in part due to the tension in the mentor's role between support and assessment (Hobson and McIntyre 2013). Arguably, external mentors, not being invested in maintaining the status quo in school settings, hold the potential to develop the disruptive capacity of NQTs by posing questions and presenting a critical 'outsider' perspective (Hodkinson and Hodkinson 2003). External sources of support can enable a safe space in which mentees reflect upon and make sense of their practice, remote from the prevailing discourse in their school contexts (McIntrye and Hobson 2015). Bhabha (1994, pp. 1-2) used the term "third space" to describe these dialogic spaces, describing them as "innovative sites of collaboration and contestation" (Bhabha 1994, pp. 1-2), where mentees can engage in "risky talk" (Eraut 2000, cited in Daly and Milton 2017, p. 180) unimpeded by school contexts. This positions external mentors as potentially powerful sources of establishing expansive learning environments (Hodkinson and Hodkinson 2003) which can support NQTs in challenging the status quo and initiating change as an integral part of their professional learning and development (Daly and Milton 2017).

2.2.7 The Impact of School Contexts

School contexts play a significant role in enabling or inhibiting "relations of practice" (Wenger 1988, cited in Langdon et al. 2019, p. 252), including mentoring activities. Kemmis et al. (2014) identify three broad categories of the practice and purposes of mentoring: mentoring as supervision, mentoring for support and mentoring as a means of collaborative self-development. Moreover, they describe mentoring activities as being framed within the organisational structures, or "practice architectures" of the school settings in which they occur, which hold the capacity to reinforce or negate certain concepts of mentoring and the enactment of these in practice may ultimately impact on the dispositions and experiences of NQTs (Kemmis et al. 2014, p. 25).

Undeniably, school leaders have the capacity to exert substantial influence over the "practice architectures" of school sites, mediating both overtly and covertly the interactions that take place (Timperley et al. 2007), as well as the types of professional learning that occur (Francisco 2017); they have the capacity to enable or constrain the practices, including mentoring, within their school contexts (Kemmis et al. 2014). Whilst it has been argued that mentoring should be considered central to developing teaching practice and the culture of learning within an organisation (Hargreaves and Fullan 2010), the value and nature of mentoring practices may vary considerably between contexts (Sunde and Ulvik 2014). The quality of mentoring is key in supporting NQTs (Hobson et al. 2009) and this may depend on the "social, cultural and organisational contexts of the school" (Ulvik and Sunde 2013, p. 756), with studies suggesting that the influence of mentors is more impactful in school contexts that value collaboration (Wang et al. 2008) and professional learning (Lee and Feng 2007). However, the full potential of mentoring may be suppressed (Hobson et al. 2006) if schools fail to endorse mentoring practice by investing time and resources for its enactment (Bullough 2005; Lee and Feng 2007). The dilemma may be compounded if school leaders remain ignorant or indifferent to the potential impact of appropriate mentor training (Ulvik and Sunde 2013).

Despite increasing international focus on the capacity for mentoring practice to enhance NQTs' experiences, the concept of mentoring remains "contested" (Kemmis et al. 2014, p. 155); enhanced understandings of the 'why' of mentoring have arguably not been matched with a consensus of how it should be enacted (Sunde and Ulvik 2014). As indicated previously, the growing appreciation of educative approaches to mentoring (Feiman-Nemser 2001) has evidenced some policy development surrounding the mentoring of novice teachers (Langdon and Ward 2015). The growing recognition of educative mentoring as an effective approach to supporting NQTs' professional learning requires mentors to consider new ways of aiding the individualised professional development of their mentees through critical engagement with their practice, and a willingness to question conventional practice and procedures that may be deeply entrenched within school settings (Stanulis and Brondyk 2013). However, Langdon and Ward (2015) argue that the principles and practices of an educative mentoring approach need to be embedded within the wider educational agenda and this may be problematic; policy may aspire to an educative stance, but the

implementation of this vision within school contexts requires clarity and a consensus regarding the intended purposes and capacity of mentoring (Garvey and Alred 2010). Commendable policies surrounding mentoring practices may be undermined if mentoring is not considered "integral" to teachers' professional development (Hargreaves and Fullan 2010, p. 50). Furthermore, the assimilation of policy surrounding mentoring, in order to establish effective mentoring practice, requires careful consideration of the complex, multi-faceted and dynamic nature of school contexts (Langdon et al. 2010). The interpretation and mediation of policy relies heavily on how school leaders 'make sense' of it and this process is both complex and challenging (März and Keltchermans 2013; Ganon-Shilon and Schechter 2018). Furthermore, the diverse perspectives of stakeholders associated with school settings, a vital aspect of policy implementation (Viennet and Pont 2017), adds to this complexity. Failure to acknowledge this may result in policy intentions not being enacted as intended (Ball et al. 2011) and this holds the potential to compromise the quality and consistency of mentoring experiences for NQTs, as well as their engagement in professional learning activities (Ingersoll and Strong 2011; OECD 2014; Langdon et al. 2019, Kardos and Johnson 2010).

2.3 A Welsh Perspective

2.3.1 Education Reform in Wales: 'Education is changing'

Prevailing inconsistencies in the provision of professional learning opportunities and support for NQTs, highlighted in international debates (Ingersoll and Smith 2004; Hobson et al. 2009; Haggarty and Postlethwaite 2012) are echoed within the Welsh education context, notably within secondary schools (OECD 2014). The significance of the quality of teaching on education outcomes is universally acknowledged (OECD 2005), yet wide discrepancies in the standard of teaching persist between schools in Wales (OECD 2014). The initiation of a raft of reviews, scrutinising the Welsh education system, have resulted in a multi-layered response to address this, positioning the transformation of education in Wales as a 'National Mission' (WG 2017b). Reviews conducted at system level (OECD 2004; OECD 2014; OECD 2017), on teacher education (Tabberer 2013; Furlong 2015) and on teachers' career, conditions and pay (Waters et al. 2018), have resulted in policy initiatives that have had, and

continue to have, considerable implications for NQTs and their experiences during induction. However, the quality and scope of induction programmes in Wales remain questionable (OECD 2018), and this could arguably be attributed to the environment in which induction processes are enacted (Shanks et al. 2020) and the degree to which a culture of professional learning is valued and supported within the school context (Lee and Fey 2007; Francisco 2017; Langdon et al. 2019).

Wales' commitment to improving standards in education has been coupled with a need to reinforce the policy implementation processes that underpin successful reform (OECD 2014; OECD 2017), reflecting the well-documented "implementation gap" between aspirations at national policy level and their realisation within individual school contexts (Jones 2011, p. 762; Hudson et al. 2019, p. 1). The ethos and rationale of policy initiatives can encounter diverse interpretations at multiple levels within school systems (Ball et al. 2011), their dissemination being filtered through national, school and individual contexts. The fundamental purposes and intentions of policy reform may be diluted, distorted or even ignored between the points of origin and enactment. Acknowledging that "the quality of an education system cannot exceed the quality of its teachers" (Barber and Mourshed, 2007, p. 15), the National Approach to Professional Learning (NAPL) (WG 2018), underpins all aspects of the National Mission (Egan and Grigg 2018). Its articulation of a commitment to principles of "subsidiarity" (Donaldson 2015, p. 111; Newton 2020, p. 215), enhanced teacher agency and a re-imagined form of teacher professionalism (Furlong 2015; Donaldson 2015) may, through diverse understandings manifested at school level, present inconsistencies in provision and opportunities for NQTs at an individual level within specific school contexts. This may be of particular significance in the wake of inherent accountability structures that have permeated previous Welsh education policy, particularly since the introduction of Leighton Andrews' '20-point plan' (Andrews 2011). This proliferation of initiatives responded to the "harsh truth" of Wales' poor performance in PISA tests (PISA 2009) and Andrews' call for "a new approach to accountability" (Andrews 2011, para 19; para 23) - a perspective that might prove challenging to discard. Significantly, it may undermine a fundamental premise of the "self-improving school system", foregrounded in Education in Wales: Our National Mission (WG 2017b, p. 35), where the aspired to culture of professional learning and inquiry-led practice may fail to transpire. The mode in which policy initiatives,

intending to advocate teachers' engagement with research in order to innovate and transform practice, are pursued within schools may have implications for the quality and quantity of professional learning experiences of NQTs, including mentoring support.

Whilst Wales' poor comparative performance in international tests such as PISA may be the most visible catalyst for changes in policy and practice in the Welsh education system since 2011 (Rees and Taylor 2014; Reynolds 2016; OECD 2017; Mutton and Burn 2020), it is by no means the sole instigator of policy reform in Wales. A growing appreciation of the need to prepare our young people for an indefinable future in a rapidly changing world has become increasingly apparent (Donaldson 2015; Furlong 2015; WG 2017b), requiring a significant reconceptualization of the aims and objectives of education and the "unashamedly ambitious" ways in which this might be achieved (WG 2017b, p. 42). The bold reform agenda in Wales, involving multiple initiatives, also responds to an appreciation of the need to reconsider the ways in which education is conceived at local, national and international level, in order to adequately prepare young people to compete in a global arena undergoing dynamic social, economic and technological changes, (Donaldson 2015), for "careers yet to be conceived and challenges not previously encountered" (WG 2017a, p. 2). Waters (2020, p. 14) highlights the significance of ensuring new teachers, as future leaders of education in Wales, should be supported in becoming the "agents of change" necessary to drive and sustain such an ambitious reform agenda (Waters 2020, p. 15).

2.3.2 Current Requirements for Induction in Wales

At the time of this study, NQTs in Wales following achievement of Qualified Teacher Status (QTS) were required to complete a full induction period, equating to three complete school terms on a full-time basis. They also needed to meet the national Professional Standards for Teaching and Leadership (WG 2017c). The statutory obligation for their daily support resides with the head teacher (WG 2017a), who must "identify an induction mentor (IM) who will provide the NQT with the appropriate day-to-day induction support" (WG 2017a, p. 2), with periodic support provided for the NQT from an EV, a local authority employee involved in quality assurance and confirmation of the "successful completion of the induction process" (Milton et al. 2020, p. 2). WG guidance attributes multiple purposes, both personal and political, to the induction process stating NQTs should be:

- afforded an opportunity to consolidate experiences gained during ITE and establish the best possible start to their entry into the teaching profession.

- provided support in establishing habits of continuous professional learning, including engagement with the new Professional Standards for Teaching and Leadership (WG 2017c), intended for career long progression; and

- responsive to the goals of the education reform agenda and national priorities within Wales (WG 2017a, pp. 2-3).

However, the proposed means of achieving these goals, remains ill-defined. Despite the identification of "high quality mentoring and supervision" as explicit requirements, there is little to suggest what high quality mentoring looks like or how it is to be achieved (WG 2017a, p. 3). The IM, in collaboration with the Headteacher (HT), is expected to provide "appropriate support" and "work closely" with the NQT to "support and challenge" them by reflecting on teaching practice through "regular professional dialogue" (WG 2017a, p. 14). Furthermore, guidance suggests that the IM should adopt a "range of strategies" to support and monitor the NQT's professional development and engagement with the professional standards (WG 2017a, p. 16). Whilst such generic descriptors might be deemed as non-prescriptive, affording a degree of autonomy in responding to unique contexts, it may also be regarded as mere rhetoric, lacking in substance and clarity. Such ambiguity poses the risk of diverse interpretations and ultimately further discrepancies in the quality and consistency of mentoring provision for NQTs.

The School Teacher Appraisal (Wales) Regulations (Gov.UK 2011) expand upon the purposes of induction in equipping NQTs to meet the needs of the education reform agenda, with a secure focus on professional learning that embraces "reflective practice, effective collaboration, coaching and mentoring, and effective use of data and research evidence" in order to consolidate ITE experiences and to promote "career-long professional growth" (Ginnis 2018, pp. 23-24). As noted above, NQTs are also required to evidence their professional practice against the new Professional Standards for Teaching and Leadership (WG 2017c). These are centred on: Pedagogy, Collaboration, Innovation, Professional Learning and Leadership and recorded in an individual Professional Learning Passport (PLP) - an online platform hosted by the EWC (Bryer et al. 2020).

Such policy stipulations may endeavour to accomplish a degree of consistency on a national scale, yet the number and quality of induction programmes in Wales remains questionable (OECD 2018), epitomising the "implementation gap" between "what is" and "what should be" (Jones 2011, p. 762) in the actualisation of policy in practice. Significantly, the OECD (2018, p. 34) identify that "Coaching/mentoring, classroom observations and peer review are not yet well established in schools throughout Wales" and attributes the discrepancies in the quality of induction to the diversity of learning cultures between school contexts. However, some have questioned the wisdom of this quest for consistency (Waters 2020, p. 10), highlighting that this emphasis has resulted in formal processes of induction that despite being "detailed, sophisticated and complex", are more focused on managerial efficiency rather than effectiveness of practice. Waters (2020, p. 11) goes on to argue that this can result in inconsistencies persisting in the "practice and experience" of NQTs. Such formal induction processes may achieve some degree of consistency in bureaucratic terms, but not in enactment and experiences, which Waters argues is impossible to achieve (Waters 2020).

2.3.3 Professional Learning in Wales

Integral to the implementation of the education reform agenda in Wales is the endeavour to "raise the bar" in terms of our expectations of teachers and this holds implications for the types of professional learning that teachers may require (OECD 2017, p. 25). As previously indicated, discussion surrounding the centrality of the quality of teaching on pupils' outcomes, evidenced in international literature (OECD 2005; Chetty et al. 2014; Burroughs et al. 2019), is echoed within the Welsh context (Furlong 2015; WG 2017b), particularly in the context of a substantial education reform agenda.

Welsh Government (2017b, p. 25) acknowledges that a "well-supported aspirational teaching profession" is critical to the success of the 'National Mission' for Wales and, pertinent to the focus of this study, "new entrants to the teaching profession are a significant part of the future success of Welsh education" (Waters et al. 2018, p. 34) and the "driving force" of the success of education reforms (Waters et al. 2018, p. 16). This builds on national policy which aspires to develop a "high-quality workforce that is vibrant, engaged and committed to continuous learning for all" (WG 2017b, p. 2). The heightened emphasis

on teaching professionals as learners is further indicated in the concept of Schools as Learning Organisations (SLO) (WG 2017d), in its premise of developing the scope of schools to "change and adapt routinely to new environments and circumstances", arguably instrumental in "bring[ing] the new curriculum to life" (OECD 2018, p. 15). Significantly the document states that stakeholders will need to "learn their way to realising their vision" (OECD 2018, p. 15), an idea reinforced by the displacement of the term professional development with professional learning previously highlighted in international literature (Easton 2008; Timperley 2011; Darling-Hammond et al. 2017; Mockler 2022).

The NAPL aims to respond to the needs of the "evolving" requirements of the new curriculum (WG 2018a, para 1) and seeks to challenge variations in the quality of teaching provision between school contexts (Ginnis et al. 2018). This endeavour has been reinforced within the Workforce Development Plan: Investing in Excellence (WG 2019a), outlining WG's aspirations for an effective workforce planning system focussed firmly on enhancing the skills of the teaching workforce. The vision is an optimistic one, based on the development of "outward looking" and "research-informed" teachers, collaborating within and across school contexts in order to raise standards and "inspire learning" (WG 2018a, p. 7). All stakeholders across the education system are identified as "vital" contributors to improving standards and shifting school cultures, however school leaders are identified as key agents in securing opportunities for professional learning (WG 2018a, p. 6).

2.3.4 Curriculum for Wales

A fundamental aspect of the ambitious education reform agenda is the launch of a new curriculum, responding to guidance from the Successful Futures report (Donaldson 2015). The restructuring of the new curriculum has been described as "radical and wide-ranging" (Donaldson 2015, p. 1) and diverges from subject specific domains to six Areas of Learning and Experience (AoLE): Expressive Arts; Health and well-being; Humanities; Languages, literacy and communication; Mathematics and numeracy; and Science and technology. In addition, Numeracy, Literacy and Digital Competence are considered to be the responsibility of all teachers (Donaldson 2015). Although a degree of flexibility is intended to afford curriculum design bespoke to specific contexts, the four key purposes are intended as

drivers of curriculum design, those being that children and young people in Wales develop as:

> " ›   ambitious, capable learners, ready to learn throughout their lives
> ›   enterprising, creative contributors, ready to play a full part in life and work
> ›   ethical, informed citizens of Wales and the world
> ›   healthy, confident individuals, ready to lead fulfilling lives as valued members of society"

(Donaldson 2015, p. 29).

Resembling many aspects of 'new curriculum' policy worldwide (Priestley and Biesta 2013; Sinnema and Aitken 2013), the new curriculum in Wales appears to signal an important adjustment in policy design and implementation. Policy development surrounding the curriculum has employed the expertise of education professionals and key stakeholders, including working parties within pioneer schools, in addition to regional consortia and WG (Sinnema et al. 2020) and this may signal an acknowledgement of the need for a "sustained and active participation of educational practitioners and the wider community" (Lewis 2015, cited in Evans 2015, no page). It may also indicate a "softening" in neoliberal principles (Evans 2021, p. 380), and a shift away from a centralised, prescriptive model to one that holds potential to be responsive to context, and this may present an opportunity for increased autonomy for both schools and teachers (Donaldson 2015).

However, the involvement of stakeholders in the curriculum development process has allowed a degree of collaboration and subsidiarity for only some selected 'pioneer' schools, with the exclusion of others (Newton 2020). This may compromise both the understanding of, and commitment to, the overarching vision of the curriculum in some school contexts, potentially negatively impacting on the willingness of some schools to fully engage in its implementation (Newton 2020). Although any school could potentially put themselves forward to be a 'pioneer', the division of two 'classes' of schools has clearly caused some resentment. In addition, where competition for students is high, some have suggested collaboration is likely to be difficult (Power et al. 2020). Such tensions inherent with the restructuring of the curriculum, and discrepancies in engagement with it, may compromise vital opportunities for collaboration between schools, leaving some schools increasingly

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lagging behind on the reform journey. This may result in inequity of experience not just for pupils, but for NQTs and the levels of support and expertise they are exposed to in preparing to teach the new curriculum (Waters 2020).

Identifying flexibility as a "key hallmark" of the new curriculum, Power et al. (2020, p. 327) acknowledge its appeal in affording schools the opportunity to be responsive to specific needs of pupils within their own context. However, in accordance with the complexities of addressing the implementation gap identified earlier (Jones 2011), they warn of the "inevitable slippage" between policy aspirations and classroom practice, as a result of inconsistencies in understandings of curriculum reform policy at school and classroom level (Power et al. 2020, p. 319). They identify flexibility of assessment as particularly problematic in this respect; whilst the proposed progression steps may be intended to afford adjustment in the pace of learning to meet the individual learning rates of pupils, there remains a lack of clarity regarding success criteria and understandings of the intended outcome of what is meant by 'deep' learning (WG 2020a). Aligning with Young and Muller's (2010) claims, this may inevitably lead to inconsistencies in how young people experience the curriculum, with disadvantaged pupils potentially faring worse (Power et al. 2020). Furthermore, disparities in teachers' understandings of the progression steps may potentially result in some teachers, particularly less experienced ones such as NQTs, inadvertently omitting conceptual steps that might be crucial for future learning, also previously suggested by Young and Muller (2010). Significantly, Donaldson acknowledges the complexities inherent in the skills of assessing "complex learning", identifying a lack of "sustained" focus on assessment both during ITE and in continued professional development (Donaldson 2015, p. 84). Nevertheless, he identifies a need for teachers to widen their repertoire of assessment strategies, the validity of which is reliant on their capabilities in designing assessments that reflect learning outcomes, proposing that teachers will need support in achieving this (Donaldson 2015).

The need to improve the quality of teaching in Wales has already been recognised (OECD 2017) but further substantial investment in resources and "targeted professional learning" (OECD 2020, p. 12) may also be necessary to enhance the knowledge, skills and capabilities of teachers in order to meet the wider demands of the curriculum and effectively

implement it in context (OECD 2020; Power et al. 2020). Donaldson (2015, p. 112) acknowledges that the success of the curriculum rests on the need to "build the confidence and capacity of teachers and school leaders", recommending the development of "an extensive and sustained programme of professional learning" (Donaldson 2015, p. 118) for teachers to support them in achieving the relevant skills and knowledge to meet the review's recommendations. However, Waters (2020) argues that the curriculum development needs of NQTs should extend beyond a mere improved awareness of the new curriculum or an explanation of its structure, that many will have encountered during ITE, instead being supported in how they can interpret reforms in their own practice and become innovators and "agents of change" (Waters 2020, pp. 20-21).

2.3.5 Teaching in Wales: A Research Informed Profession

The emphasis on developing research-informed teaching practice, promoting teacher engagement with "close to practice" research (WG 2018a; Wyse et al. 2018, p. 1), is also a prominent aspect of the reform agenda depicted in the New Deal's four key components of the Professional Learning Model: effective collaboration; reflective practice; effective use of data and research evidence; and coaching and mentoring (WG 2015, p. 2). The theme of a research-informed profession continues with the new 'national approach' to professional learning, that advocates a "research driven culture" whereby teachers improve and innovate their practice through scrutiny and reflective practice (WG 2018a, p. 25). Secure engagement with research and inquiry-based practice is a recurring theme throughout the education reform agenda (WG 2015; WG 2017b; WG 2018a). Early recommendations for ITE reform emphasised the need to reinforce explicit links between theory and practice to enhance an understanding of the "how" and "why" of teaching, in addition to the "what" (Donaldson 2015, cited in Furlong 2015 p. 7) but this is not articulated as being exclusive to trainee teachers, being highly relevant to the entire teaching workforce and continuing professional development (Furlong 2015, p. 7)

The concept of a research-informed teaching profession is echoed further in the premise of SLOs (Kools and Stoll 2016; Welsh Government 2017d), a model that promotes professional learning as a means of "challenging thinking as part of changing practice" (WG 2017d; OECD 2018, p. 3) and seeks to develop school cultures that value inquiry and innovation, and supports staff to take risks and trial novel ways of doing things (WG 2017d). The emphasis

on change is an important one that holds implications for the ways in which teachers perceive their purpose and professional identity. Embracing and driving change requires the ability to adapt and provides scope for teachers to become "pedagogical innovators and agents of change" (Daly and Milton 2017, p. 181) and this would seem to be a vital element in the supporting policy intention to rebuild and transform education in Wales, highlighted in the 'Education is changing' strapline (WG 2020b). However, the Welsh SLO model has faced criticism because the focus of raising research capacity tends to be on enhancing school effectiveness, which may detract from teachers' own self-motivation to engage in research to enhance their own personal professional development and effectiveness in the classroom (Egan and Grigg 2018).

The concept of a research-informed profession is further discernible within the values and dispositions underpinning the new Professional Standards for Teaching and Leadership (WG 2017c), which NQTs have been required to work towards since their publication in 2017 and have been an expectation for all teachers since 2018. The new standards are intended to serve as indicators of effective pedagogical approaches and to empower practitioners to reflect on their teaching to further develop practice that supports the "realisation" of the new curriculum (WG 2017c, no page number). Significantly, the standards include expectations for 'Innovation' and 'Professional Learning' which explicitly reinforce the concepts of inquiry-based practice, collaboration and career-long learning, inherent within other key policy documents (Donaldson 2015; WG 2017b; WG 2018a). NQTs are required to: make "reasoned decisions based upon relevant reading and research findings"; use the PLP to engage in "reflective practice"' and evidence "an active commitment to continuing professional learning, leading to the controlled implementation of new or revised techniques and approaches" (WG 2017c, no page number). The requirement that NQTs exhibit a "willingness to develop and apply new techniques" (WG 2017c, no page number), reinforces the reform agenda's theme of embracing change in order to transform education in Wales. The skills, knowledge and dispositions promoted within the new standards and other policy initiatives (Donaldson 2015; WG 2017b; WG 2018a), suggest a shift away from a competency-based approach, to one where teachers are encouraged to be dynamic and innovative professionals, in accordance with the vision set out by Furlong (2015) and Donaldson (2015).

ITE, an early priority in the reform agenda, should arguably have made some progress towards the recommendations posed by Furlong (2015). Acknowledging the inadequacies in ITE provision highlighted by Tabberer (2013), Furlong's (2015) report 'Teaching Tomorrow's Teachers', suggested an increased emphasis was needed on the ability to teach pupils to "learn how to learn", extending understandings of pedagogy beyond subject specialisms (Furlong 2006; Furlong 2015, p. 5). This stance has been echoed in Donaldson's revised organisation of the curriculum into six AoLEs (Donaldson 2015).

Furlong advocates the need to reinforce links between education theory and practice, with an increased focus on inquiry based, research-led practice (Furlong 2015) which resonates with Donaldson's claim that learners in the 21st century will require teachers with a robust understanding of the "why" and the "how" of teaching, as well as the "what" (Donaldson 2015, p. 58). A key recommendation outlined in Furlong's report is the need to ensure that ITE providers support student teachers in becoming "both critical consumers *of* as well as participants *in* research" (Furlong 2015, p. 32, author's emphasis), and this would be a fundamental criterion of his proposed modification of accreditation processes requiring ITE providers to competitively tender for re-accreditation (Furlong 2015). Enhancement of student teachers' research capacity arguably lies at the heart of what has been envisaged as a new form of teacher professionalism (Furlong 2015) required to support wider education reform, including the new curriculum (Donaldson 2015).

If such recommendations, promoting teaching as a research-informed profession, have begun to be adopted successfully within accredited ITE programmes, an NQT may potentially be developing their own informed understanding of the demands of the new curriculum, as well as knowledge and experience of inquiry-based practice (Flores 2018). This however may not be mirrored in the knowledge and understandings of the staff they work alongside in diverse school contexts (Ball et al. 2011; Bergmark and Hansson 2020), and this may hold implications for NQTs' experiences of mentoring in the induction year.

2.3.6 Induction and Mentoring Provision in Wales

Despite an increased understanding of the potential impact of an NQTs' experiences during their first year of teaching (Ingersoll and Strong 2011; Allen and Sims 2018), within a reform

agenda that identifies the quality of teaching as key to its success (OECD 2017; WG 2017b), the issue of induction has historically received limited policy attention (OECD 2017). Although education policy in Wales has more recently evidenced an increased emphasis on the role of the mentor in supporting the learning and development of early career teachers (Penikett et al. 2019), a number of concerns surrounding continued discrepancies in both induction programmes and mentoring provision persist in the Welsh context (Bryer et al. 2020; Waters 2020), with suggestions that more effective support is required for teachers at the beginning of their careers (Waters 2020).

The potential impact of coaching and mentoring on the experiences of NQTs in Wales has increasingly been recognised (OECD 2018; WG 2019a), notably in relation to inquiry-based approaches to professional learning (OECD 2018), as well NQTs' continued commitment to the profession (Beaufort Research and NFER 2019). The significance of this is noted in the Workforce Development Plan which appears to hold some promise in its intention to review and "restructure" the mandatory induction period and develop "a programme of support" for NQTs (WG 2019a, p.27), including a national coaching and mentoring programme, as part of an Early Career Support Package (ECSP). Whilst this could potentially be a timely response to enduring inconsistencies in mentoring provision for NQTs, as well as limitations identified in some elements of the IM's role (Bryer et al.2020), at the time of writing further details surrounding the ECSP have yet to be published.

As previously indicated, the education reform agenda in Wales reflects a heightened appreciation of the complexities of teaching in the current, dynamic global context (Furlong 2015; Donaldson 2015; WG 2017); and foregrounds high quality teaching as "central" to its vision for education in Wales (WG 2022, p. 2). Mentoring activities will require a nuanced understanding of the aims and vision of policy in order to support the NQT in being effective in their role in the wider reform agenda. However, evidence suggests that IMs' understanding of the reform agenda is "variable" (Waters 2020, p. 4), meaning that NQTs' level of support may be compromised in certain contexts.

The growing emphasis on teachers as learners, evidenced in international debates surrounding education policy (Easton 2008), is echoed in the Welsh context which aspires to a teaching profession where "teachers should be the most dedicated students in the

classroom" (WG 2017b, p. 27). The concept of teachers as lifelong learners was evidenced in the New Deal for the Education Workforce (2015), which championed a model of professional learning that emphasised the concept of teachers as lifelong learners through four pillars: collaboration, reflective practice, enquiry-based practice, coaching and mentoring (WG 2015). The coaching and mentoring aspect is of import here; its inherent function is in supporting the remaining pillars, through the facilitation of reflective and inquiry-based practice, and collaboration. However, the policy was ultimately revised and rebranded as the new National Approach to Professional Learning (WG 2018a), in an endeavour to address enduring variations in equity of access to quality professional learning (Children, Young People and Education Committee 2017).

The Professional Learning Journey, as part of the NAPL (WG 2018a), intended to support and guide schools through system wide models of professional learning, proposes that in the context of the less prescriptive curriculum, schools and practitioners should be motivated to reflect on current practice and engage with professional inquiries, taking initiative and evidence-informed risks that support innovation and the identification of what works within their specific context (WG 2017d). The professional learning journey further promotes continuous professional learning in collaboration with others, both within schools and the wider education system (WG 2018a). The collegial and co-constructivist approaches to professional learning advocated here, hold implications for the type of mentoring activities deemed to be most effective in realising WG's policy aspirations. Semantically, the reform agenda policy in Wales, in its quest for a "new form of professionalism", may imply the need for a transformative, rather than a transmissive model of professional learning, where teachers are encouraged to engage with research to improve their practice, embracing change rather than accepting the status quo (Furlong 2015, pp. 5-6). This holds implications for both the perception and enactment of the mentor's role, placing increased emphasis on the mentor as a teacher-educator, supporting novice teachers in developing "adaptive expertise" and becoming "agents of change" (Langdon and Ward 2015, pp. 241-242), as opposed to the traditional "buddy" (Stanulis and Brondyk 2013, p. 2). However, the articulation of such aspirations lacks clarity of intention, and this may compromise its translation at both school and individual level (Jones 2011). Waters (2020) asserts that induction policy reform remains ill-defined and questions the intended

outcomes of these modifications by asking "how do we want our new teachers to behave?" (Waters 2020, p. 6). His avian metaphor effectively interrogates which type of "fledgling" we might seek to encourage: a risk aversive individual, encouraged to "stick close to the nest", or one who embraces new challenges, striving for independence in order to "glide, soar, swoop and dive" (Waters 2020, p. 6).

Inconsistencies in the provision of mentoring have been partially attributed to the complexity of arrangements and lack of clarity over roles and responsibilities of those involved in the induction process (Bryer et al. 2020). WG's (2022) recent proposals respond to such ambiguities in current induction arrangements, notably the IM's dual roles of supporter and judge, which are often conflated and can be problematic for both the mentor and mentee (Cullingford 2006). Current proposals intend to separate these roles by allocating "the decision-making function on the outcome of induction (validation)" to EVs and the Awarding Body (AB), whilst the responsibility for supporting the NQTs resides with the IM (WG 2023, p. 6). However, the IM's responsibility for the "recommendation" (WG 2023, p.6) of whether the NQT has met the professional standards still retains an element of judgement, albeit on an internal rather than external basis. This holds implications for the ways in which NQTs are supported by their IM in meeting the professional standards, which may potentially be experienced as an accountability measure or 'checklist' to passing induction (Bryer et al. 2020), rather than the proposed intention for the professional standards to act as a framework for NQTs to reflect upon authentic teaching experiences, with the support of a mentor, in order to develop their practice (WG 2022). Despite warnings that complex accountability measures might detract from the professional learning of teachers (Donaldson 2018), policy enactments in some contexts may result in the judgement of passing induction being based upon the "clerical burden" of documentation and evidencing the standards on paper, rather than on effectiveness of practice (Waters 2020, p. 15). Studies in Wales support international findings that engagement with the standards is variable, and frequently considered an onerous "box ticking" activity (Bryer et al. 2020; Waters 2020, p. 19), which potentially compromises professional learning experiences for both NQTs and the mentors who support them (Waters 2020). Thus, along with reports indicating variability in the quality of evidence submitted for the PLP (Waters 2020), NQTs in Wales are still frequently 'judged' on paper rather than practice which is

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likely to encourage an instrumental approach to supporting NQTs in meeting the standards. Whilst a mentor's organisational capabilities in guiding or cajoling NQTs through impending deadlines and induction processes may be deemed of value by some, it potentially diminishes the NQT's progress towards self-sufficiency and independence (Waters 2020). Whilst policy direction remains nebulous (Waters 2020), the potential for inconsistencies in the experiences of NQTs remains, despite the overarching intention to establish equity (WG 2018b). Nevertheless, the pursuit for consistency remains questionable; the induction processes detailed by WG may indicate a consistency in "managerial" terms, yet the practices and experiences that promote the professional growth of NQTs continue to be inconsistent (Waters 2020, p. 11). Despite some evidence of improvement in alignment between policies, including SLOs and the NAPL, through the Professional Learning Journey, further clarification and guidance may be required to avoid a continued lack of policy cohesion that may undermine the realisation of the aspirations that the policies promote (Egan et al. 2018). Policies require mediation through often diverse school cultures, and this holds implications for the ways in which mentoring relationships and experiences are brokered within individual school contexts (Bubb and Earley, 2007). Complexities and competing priorities within different school contexts may result in a "disjunction" between policy intention and enactment (Schuck et al. 2018, p. 219).

The recruitment and retention of IMs in Wales also remains problematic (Bryer et al. 2020), involving a high turnover, with many adopting the role as a result of their availability rather than their experience, level of training and disposition to mentoring (WG 2022); this may result in varied and changeable experiences for NQTs. This problem is exacerbated for some because although training opportunities for IMs are available, offered and facilitated by local authorities (LAs) and consortia, participation is varied despite financial reimbursement (Bryer et al.2020; Milton et al. 2020). Proposals for mandatory training for IMs respond to variations in uptake of training (Bryer et al. 2020), as well as the quality and consistency of mentoring support but mentors need to be afforded time to engage with this (Beaufort Research and NFER 2019).

Further problems experienced by NQTs in Wales include variations in the accessibility and availability of mentors, frequently due to competing demands from holding other senior roles, which ultimately impacts on the time available to support NQTs (Bryer et al. 2020).

Consequently, it has been recommended that clear expectations in terms of time commitment, should be acknowledged in adopting the role, including the frequency of meetings (Bryer et al. 2020).

A recent WG impact assessment of proposed changes in the statutory induction of NQTs in Wales (WG 2023) suggests some recognition of the significance of the IM role, with the intention to invest additional funding of up to £1050 per year to ensure IM support for NQTs. However, these funds are intended to be allocated per school rather than the number of NQTs and thus the potential impact may be questionable, particularly for IMs who are responsible for multiple NQTs. Additionally, further proposals to allow flexibility for NQTs to potentially complete induction after one term of teaching (WG 2023), providing they have successfully met the professional standards, would also presumably involve the removal of mentor support, ergo the IM funding attached to it. Whilst this may prove beneficial as a cost cutting exercise (WG 2023), it raises questions surrounding how the IM role may be enacted in diverse contexts, particularly if it is carried out in a 'part time' capacity over potentially one term rather than an entire academic year. Affording opportunities for NQTs to complete induction early may also be considered economically astute in creating savings of £900 per term from funds that would conventionally cover costs for the 10% of protected time for NQTs to be released from the timetable (WG 2023). Although yet to be legislated for, the finer details of such amendments to induction policy need to be made clear and explicit to stakeholders to avoid a potential policy "implementation gap" between "what is" and "what should be" (Jones 2011, p .762) which may result in further inequities and challenges for NQTs.

2.4 The Impact of Covid-19 on the Experiences of NQTs

2.4.1 The Context of Covid-19

Since February 2020, education systems across the globe have faced unparalleled challenges as a result of the wide and rapid transmission of Covid-19 (Meinke et al. 2022). Schools have experienced multiple lockdowns, resulting in often lengthy periods away from school for both pupils and staff alike; Meinke et al. (2022) estimate that in excess of 90% of school-aged learners worldwide were affected at the height of school closures in April 2020. In an endeavour to minimise discontinuity of learning, teachers were required to swiftly shift pedagogical practices to online and blended learning approaches, that they may not have been fully conversant in (Schleicher 2020). This has involved significant disruption to ways of working, presenting extra demands and challenges to both schools and teachers (Schleicher and Reimers 2020; Sharp et al. 2020).

There is an increasing body of research surrounding the impact of Covid-19 on education, largely focussed on pupils' experiences, including academic progress (Dorn et al. 2020; Kuhfeld et al. 2020) and well-being (Asbury et al. 2020; Lee 2020), with less attention given to its impact on teachers, including those who are new to the profession (Choate et al. 2021; Hargreaves 2021). Importantly, it has been increasingly acknowledged that endeavours to address the issues surrounding the impact of the pandemic on pupils' learning cannot be achieved without a robust education workforce, making the effective support of teachers vital in such turbulent times (Darling-Hammond and Hyler, 2020).

2.4.2 The Impact on NQTs

The plethora of challenges faced by teachers in their first year of teaching during normal times is well-documented (Buchanan et al. 2013; Gallant and Riley 2014; Langdon et al. 2014), however the experiences of the transition from ITE to NQT during the global Covid-19 pandemic have been more complex and onerous (Moorhouse 2021). The pandemic has simultaneously thrown familiar issues surrounding NQTs into "sharper relief" (la Velle et al. 2020, p. 603), whilst adding a new and unique dimension to these experiences. If the systems of support for NQTs in Wales were deemed "ill-prepared" in consolidating NQTs'

experiences during ITE prior to the pandemic (Waters 2020, p. 5), the dilemma has now likely been exacerbated. The diminished experiences of NQTs during ITE, also because of the pandemic (Morgan et al. 2022), may have also weakened the foundations that induction experiences are intended to build upon.

The 20/21 cohort of NQTs were particularly hard hit during the pandemic in that multiple and extended periods of lockdown altered ways of working which would have significantly impacted both their experiences during ITE and their induction year, a significant phase in teacher growth development and identity (Glazzard and Coverdale 2018). Significantly, in March 2020 WG amended induction policy to ensure no detriment to the current cohort of NQTs as a result of the pandemic; the minimum number of sessions required to complete induction was reduced from 380 sessions (equating to three terms) to 110 sessions (equating to one term), providing the professional standards had been met (WG 2020c). The intention was to avoid NQTs, who had met the standards, being prevented from completing induction, because they had been unable to complete 380 sessions within the academic year.

Furthermore, under this new guidance (WG 2020c), professional learning sessions would count towards the total number of induction sessions up to a maximum of 16% of the duration of their induction period. This was intended to reflect the increased significance of career-long professional learning at a time when teachers may have needed to develop approaches to online and blended teaching and learning (WG 2020c).

2.4.3 Covid-19 and ITE: Diminished experiences

Whilst these policy amendments attempted to address issues of equity for NQTs completing induction during the pandemic, it does present a dilemma for this cohort of NQTs whose required minimum number of sessions during ITE were reduced by 25% (from 120 to 90 sessions), with the stipulation that experience should take place across 2 settings being suspended (WG 2020d). This presents a significant reduction in the expected diversity and duration of experiences prior to induction, resulting in some doubt within schools about the adequacy of ITE experiences in preparing this cohort of trainee teachers for their roles as NQTs (Morgan et al. 2022). It also potentially left many NQTs feeling ill-prepared for the

role, even questioning the validity of their qualification in comparison to previous cohorts (Morgan et al. 2022) and may hold further significance for NQTs where high quality preparation during ITE is considered essential in meeting the challenges of induction, impacting positively on job satisfaction and continued commitment to the profession (Hulme and Wood 2022).

NQTs in this cohort experienced a significant time gap in their teaching practice, the majority not having taught in a classroom between the start of the first lockdown in March 2020 and taking up new roles as NQTs in September 2020. If transition from ITE to induction has historically been considered "too abrupt" in Wales (Waters et al. 2018, p. 34), this extended gap in classroom experience may have heightened this and potentially deepened the "reality shock" (Veenman 1984, p. 143) that many NQTs experience when starting induction in non-covid times.

Inevitably, NQTs will have encountered diverse experiences during ITE depending upon context, with some experiencing more severe disruption and marked curtailment of pedagogical practice (Morgan et al. 2022). However, at its extreme, the 20/21 cohort of NQTs could have potentially completed minimum requirements for both ITE and induction having undergone approximately two terms of teaching experience over two academic years. If we acknowledge that classroom experience is a vital aspect of teacher training (Anderson and Stillman 2013) and that teaching experience is fundamental for the development of pedagogy (Goldhaber et al. 2020; Ronfeldt et al. 2020), then inevitably it must be accepted that some NQTs entering the profession at this time were 'on the back foot' and additional support may be necessary to counteract this (la Velle et al. 2020).

2.4.4 Opportunities for NQTs

Despite the challenges faced, the pandemic has also presented new opportunities for NQTs. Schools' endeavours to adapt to online teaching have resulted in the development of new pedagogical approaches using digital technology (Eickelmann and Gerick 2020, cited in Konig et al. 2020). Darling-Hammond and Hyler (2020) assert that within this context, NQTs hold the potential to bring new and fresh perspectives and share expertise of digital

technologies, vital in the rapid shift to online learning, whilst still continuing to learn themselves (Bailey and Schurz 2020; Rosenberg et al. 2020).

Shanks and Carver (2021) optimistically present such altered ways of working in opportunistic terms, claiming that they afforded new teachers the opportunity to lead others in developing digital skills and to pro-actively establish informal support networks through social media platforms (Shanks and Carver 2021). However, in concluding that we might need to "reconsider just how punishing new teachers find their induction if they report being able to take a global pandemic in their stride" (Shanks and Carver 2021, p. 12) they seem to undermine the complexities inherent in the multiple challenges faced by NQTs during this crucial phase (Glazzard and Coverdale 2018). It further neglects a nuanced appreciation of the numerous factors which can result in diverse experiences for NQTs (Paniagua and Sanchez-Martin 2019; Milton et al. 2020) and the potential legacy of those experiences on future career trajectories (Kutsyuruba et al. 2019).

The pandemic may have acted as a catalyst for many in bringing about a fundamental change in education (Hollweck and Doucet 2020) and stimulating optimism in the chance to "build back better" (Quilter-Pinner and Ambrose 2020, p. 7) but Hargreaves (2021) urges caution in recognising the potential discrepancies between the optimistic "bright spots" and "silver linings" emphasised by some policy makers, and teachers' perspectives and experiences (Hargreaves 2021, p. 1839). This holds significance for new teachers in the risk it poses of failing to identify and provide appropriate professional learning opportunities and support at this pivotal time to allow them to flourish in their roles (Schuck et al. 2018), which may ultimately undermine an appreciation of the extra support that may be required for NQTs who completed induction during the pandemic (Morgan et al. 2022).

However, NQTs in Wales, who have completed accredited university routes into ITE, may hold a potential further advantage in such uncertain times. If the newly accredited ITE programmes have effectively responded to policy recommendations (Furlong 2015) in the facilitation of opportunities for trainee teachers to critically reflect and engage in research-informed practice, they would arguably be "well-placed" to adapt to the fluctuating circumstances that the lockdown regulations have presented (la Velle et al 2020, p. 603).

This cannot be presumed for the 20/21 cohort of NQTs because of both their significantly curtailed experiences during ITE, as a result of the pandemic, that might have compromised the development of these skills and dispositions and the fact that this was the first year of implementation for these newly accredited ITE programmes.

The development of online platforms such as Microsoft Teams and Zoom, has allowed the barriers of space and time to be minimised when communicating with colleagues, an important means of support for NQTs (Hall et al. 2008; Heikkinen et al. 2018). Remote mentoring has allowed a greater degree of flexibility for both the mentor and the mentee (Owen 2015), potentially enabling more frequent opportunities for mentoring support, that may impact on new teachers' continued commitment to the profession (Maready et al. 2021). However, although research into the nature of interaction when mentoring early career professionals online is limited (Mullen 2020), there are claims that the development of interpersonal relationships, a fundamental element of mentoring practice (Kutsyuruba et al. 2019), may be slower online than face-to face (Ersin and Atay 2021). In addition, whilst the development of online platforms might hypothetically improve the frequency and duration of communication between and a mentor and their mentee, this is not a given. There is some evidence that mentoring activities may not have been a priority during the pandemic, with mentors having been under intense pressure in responding to their own issues (Ersin and Atay 2021).

The need for schools to facilitate professional learning opportunities to support teachers in developing effective online pedagogy at this time is well documented (Flores and Gago 2020; la Velle et al. 2020; Moorhouse 2020). Whilst the emphasis on developing digital skills was an immediate and pressing priority, other longstanding professional learning priorities for NQTs remained, including the need for support with behaviour management (Skiba et al. 2016) and developing pedagogy (Schuck et al. 2016). Furthermore, the professional learning priorities of the education reform agenda in Wales, exemplified in the NAPL (WG 2018a), and the Professional Standards for Teaching and Learning (WG 2017c), and determined by the need to respond to the evolving education landscape in Wales, significantly a new curriculum (WG 2020a), also remained.

2.5 Summary

Despite induction programmes being globally recognised as being an effective support mechanism for NQTs, prior to the pandemic the OECD (2017, p. 32) suggest that "little is known about the quality of induction programmes in Wales" beyond reports of their questionable quality and scope (OECD 2018). The research surrounding the mentoring of NQTs during induction in Wales is more prolific (Daly et al. 2017; Langdon et al. 2019; Waters et al. 2020; Bryer et al. 2020; Milton et al. 2022) but there is limited evidence of how NQTs in Wales experienced induction and mentoring during a global pandemic and at a time of a significant and sustained education reform agenda. The professional learning of NQTs is vital to their professional development (Sutcher et al. 2016; Cater 2017) and retention in the profession (Gallant and Riley 2017), as well as being central to the realisation of the education reform agenda (Furlong 2015; WG 2017b; Waters et al. 2018). Although studies highlight prevailing inconsistencies in the provision of professional learning opportunities for NQTs prior to the pandemic, notably in secondary schools (OECD 2014), there is currently limited evidence of how this vital aspect of induction was experienced in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Accordingly, this study aims to focus on the following research questions:

- In what ways has the Covid-19 pandemic impacted upon the experiences of NQTs during induction?

- How do NQTs describe their lived experiences during induction, with a particular focus on being mentored?

- What are NQTs' perceptions of the formal mentoring activities they experience during their NQT year and how have they impacted on their professional learning?

- What are NQTs' perceptions of informal mentoring experiences during their NQT year and how have these impacted their professional learning?

Chapter 3: Methods and methodology

3.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the methodological considerations underpinning this qualitative study that sought to investigate the lived experiences of NQTs undergoing induction in Wales during the academic year September 2020 to July 2021. The original rationale for the study's focus centred upon NQTs' experiences of induction at a time of a substantial education reform agenda in Wales. Thus, the methods and approaches described here were initially adopted to answer the following research questions:

- How do NQTs describe their lived experiences during induction, with a particular focus on being mentored?
- What are NQTs' perceptions of the formal mentoring activities they experience during their NQT year and how have they impacted on their professional learning?
- What are NQTs' perceptions of informal mentoring experiences during their NQT year and how have these impacted their professional learning?

However, at the outset of the study, the possibility of a global pandemic occurring was inconceivable. Compliance with health and safety regulations, introduced in response to Covid-19, had a substantial impact on all aspects of the education system, requiring teachers to significantly alter their ways of working (Kim and Asbury 2021). NQTs, the focus of this study, would have been particularly impacted during this period, having both their ITE and induction year compromised, both in content and duration, as a consequence of multiple, often lengthy episodes of lockdown, in addition to periods of isolation (Morgan et al. 2022).

Despite the altered landscape against which this study would take place, it was decided not to delay the planned data collection period for two fundamental reasons. Firstly, the pandemic created a time of great uncertainty. There was little indication of how long the circumstances would prevail and thus how long the study would need to be delayed for, which was problematic with the timeframe of my candidature on the Professional Doctorate in Education Programme. Secondly, to coin the term of the media at the time, the circumstances were 'unprecedented' and thus presented a valuable opportunity to research

the induction experiences of NQTs in a unique and remarkable context. Consequently, the following research question supplemented the research design:

In what ways has the Covid-19 pandemic impacted upon the experiences of NQTs during induction?

This chapter begins by presenting the rationale that underpins the methodological perspectives adopted in this study, followed by a description of the research design and methods used. Next, an account is provided of how data were collected, including a rationale and justification for the strategies that were undertaken. Subsequently, a description of the processes involved in the analysis of the data will be presented, including strategies for organisation and reflection. Thereafter, ethical issues are discussed, being positioned here within the chapter solely for purposes of organisation and clarity. Ethical considerations were integral to all aspects of the study (British Educational Research Association (BERA) 2018), from its inception to the writing up of conclusions, and the artifice of their presentation in a discrete section should be acknowledged. This section will also consider issues surrounding the positionality of the researcher.

3.2 Research Design and Methodological approach

Social reality can be perceived and interpreted using different dimensions and a vital aspect of research methodology is to make explicit the underlying assumptions and understandings that the researcher holds regarding how to investigate and come to 'know' the social world of the participants of this study. Historically, debates surrounding methodology have centred on two conflicting paradigms: positivism and interpretivism. Presented simplistically, positivism can be identified in its objective pursuit of a single truth, whereas interpretivism denies the concept of a single reality (Cresswell and Plano Clark 2007). This work adopts an alternative approach – pragmatism – that resists the idea of absolute objective or subjective stances offered by positivism and interpretivism respectively, regarding them as inadequate in informing our understanding of social reality (McCaslin 2008, cited in Given 2008). Originating in the works of Peirce (1878), James (1907) and Dewey (1931; 1982) pragmatism presents a philosophy concerned with the realities of life and an individual's direct experience of the world that they inhabit in order to construct meaning (Hammond 2013; Robson and McCartan 2016). Pragmatism's quest for 'reality'

acknowledges it to be both objective and socially constructed (Johnson and Onwuegbuzie 2004), and thus recognises the co-construction of meaning between the researcher and participants. Departing from other dominant philosophies, pragmatists embrace the inherent values that researchers and their participants bring to the field (McCaslin 2008), regarding them as central, from the inception of the research focus, throughout the research and ultimately its interpretation (Robson 2011). However, as Delamont (2002, p. 8) asserts "good research is highly tuned to the interrelationship of the investigator with the respondents", and this requires acknowledgement of "the asymmetrical power relations" (Kvale 2002, p. 12) that present themselves as a result of my position as researcher, as well as my status, knowledge and experience in the field. Despite endeavours to adopt a position of "empathic neutrality" (Ormston et al. 2014, p. 8), it is vital to acknowledge that my multiple roles and experiences of mentoring make complete impartiality very challenging, and a high degree of reflexivity is essential in my understanding of my impact on the collection and subsequent analysis of data (Delamont 2002).

Adopting a pragmatic approach liberates the researcher from aligning with a single paradigm, positivism or interpretivism (Johnson et al. 2007), instead viewing reality as fluid, being constantly negotiated within situations and contexts, rather than a fixed or singular concept (Bryman 2016). This can allow a more flexible and reflexive approach to research design (Feilzer 2010), thus enabling a deeper interrogation of meaning and experience in order to afford the generation of "rich[er] data" (Cohen et al. 2011, p. 23).

Pragmatism presents the perspective that reality and truth are mutable, negotiated within relationships and situations (Bryman 2006; McCaslin 2008). Essentially, truth alters over time (because reality is shifting), and through space (because people have diverse perspectives) (Durkheim 1983, cited in Given 2008). This is pertinent to this qualitative longitudinal study that seeks to explore the lived experiences of NQTs being mentored over the course of their induction year where exposure to new experiences and contexts may alter perspectives and their sense of personal and professional identify over time (Pillen et al. 2013; Nichols et al. 2016), which may have been further heightened in the context of Covid-19.

Significantly, rather than focusing on the complexities of philosophical stances (Robson and McCartan 2016, p. 27), pragmatism prioritises consideration of what are the best methods in which to answer the research question as the "crucial arbiter" in decisions surrounding methodological approaches (Bryman 2006, p. 118). In this study, the 'what' aspect of the research question intends to consider how things occur, rather than causal relationships (Maxwell 2013). It signifies a wider purpose than mere description; rather it is exploratory in nature, attempting to establish a deep and nuanced understanding of NQTs' experiences surrounding mentoring and professional learning amid an education reform agenda at the time of a global pandemic (Robson and McCartan 2016). Consequently, it lends itself to a qualitative approach (Maxwell 2013; Van de Ven 2007).

Epistemologically, the pragmatist paradigm always foregrounds drawing on all the available data to fully answer the research questions and affords a degree of flexibility in that the methods and tools adopted are those that are deemed optimal in solving the problems under consideration (Robson 2011). This is significant to the longitudinal design of this study that anticipates fluctuations in participants' experiences, and interpretations of them, over time, particularly in the uncertain context of Covid-19 (Calman et al. 2013; Hermanowicz 2013). Adopting a pragmatist stance allows the researcher flexibility to respond to the data as it is generated (Hermanowicz 2013; Farrall 2006). This is of particular significance in the unpredictable context of Covid-19 where flexibility might be vital in responding to unanticipated data. Furthermore, flexibility in responding to the data would allow opportunities to be adaptive in pursuing lines of inquiry that may have been missed in previous interviews (Elliott 2005), to seek "corrective feedback" (Reinharz 1992, p. 37) on interpretation of data, and improve the precision of questioning in subsequent interviews (Holloway and Jefferson 2000, cited in Gubrium et al. 2012).
 The following sections provide an overview of the logic underpinning the approaches adopted and provide justification for decisions made in developing the research design.

3.3 Research Strategy

The research questions framed here required me to elicit, in interview situations, participants' reflections and detailed descriptions of their lived experiences and perceptions of these, in order to elucidate, as part of this study, a "deep understanding" of their

mentoring experiences during their first year of teaching which occurred during a global pandemic (Cresswell 2008 p. 62). Consequently, a qualitative research strategy was adopted in order to focus on participants' experiences in their own words, rather than a quantitative approach to data collection and analysis (Bryman 2016). A qualitative approach facilitates an attempt to "interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them" (Denzin and Lincoln 2011, p. 3) and resonates with the project's questions which seek to "derive interpretations, not facts or laws, from respondent talk" (Warren 2002, p. 83).

3.4 Methods

Data were collected longitudinally via semi-structured, online video interviews conducted at four points throughout the academic year. These in-depth interviews were selected as the principal method of data collection for their capacity to evoke "rich, thick descriptions" and capture the participants' perspectives and interpretations of their experiences (Kvale 1996; Bloomberg and Volpe 2019, p. 193). A semi-structured approach was adopted, incorporating an interview guide that framed the discussions, whilst simultaneously providing scope for participants to present their unique experiences in their own words. It thus enabled the interviewer to probe for clarification and deeper meaning, whilst allowing scope to follow up spontaneous responses from participants that may not have been anticipated (Lune and Berg 2017).

The experiences of an NQT sit within a determined time frame, which is conventionally one academic year, but may vary according to their contractual situation or ability to evidence government mandated standards (WG 2011). It was decided to conduct four interviews over the course of the academic year (2020/2021). The researcher, from personal experience, concluded that the end of term is an important temporal marker in the academic year and a pertinent point in which to reflect on the experiences of the previous weeks. Consequently, an introductory interview was planned for September, the beginning of the school year, with subsequent interviews at the end of the Christmas, Spring and Summer terms (Table 2).

Table 2: A summary of the participants' roles and contract types and the approach taken in collecting longitudinal interview data.

Pseudonym	Subject	Phase	Medium	Contract type at start of induction	Contract type at end of study	I.1	I.2	I.3	I.4
Gabby	English	S	EM	T	P	Y	Y	Y	Y
Esme	English	S	EM	T	P	Y	Y	Y	Y
Rachel	RE	S	EM	T	T	Y	Y	Y	Y
Lucy	Business Studies	S	EM	T	P	Y	Y	Y	Y
Richard	English	S	EM	T	P	Y	Y	Y	Y
John	History/ Science	S	EM/WM	T	P	Y	Y	Y	Y
Eleanor	N/A	P	WM	T	P	Y	Y	Y	Y
Jane	MFL	S/P	EM	T	T	Y	Y	Y	Y
Julie	PE	S	EM	S	S	Y	Y	Y	Y
Marcus[1]	English	S	EM	T	Unknown	Y	N	N	N

Key:

Phase: S=Secondary; P = Primary

Language Medium: EM = English medium; WM = Welsh medium

Contract type: P = Permanent; T = Temporary; S = Supply

Interviews/Context of Covid-19:

I.1 = Introductory interview: September/October 2020. All schools had re-opened in September 2020 following the national lockdown (March – June 2020) and the phased re-opening of schools (June – July 2020)

I.2 = Interview Round 2: December 2020. Schools had remained open from September to December, except for a 'firebreak' from 23rd October – 9th November. Classes, year groups

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[1] Marcus withdrew from the study following the introductory interview.

and individuals isolated in cases of testing positive for Covid-19. All secondary schools moved online from 14th December 2020.

I.3 = Interview Round 3: March 2021. A second national lockdown took place from January to April 2021, with some classes returning on 22nd February. The majority of teaching and learning took place online.

I.4 = Final Interview: June/July 2021. Schools re-open to all pupils in April 2021. Social distancing measures remained in place, with isolation of classes, year groups and individuals in the event of a positive Covid-19 test.

3.5 The Sample

The participants were initially selected using purposive sampling (Merriam 2009), which sought to identify individuals who met the criteria of being an NQT in the Welsh context, the most basic and visible characteristic that distinguishes them from the wider teaching population (Lune and Berg 2017). Subsequent sampling would be a rudimentary attempt to represent the wider population of NQTs (Thomas 2017), including primary and secondary phases, Welsh and English medium contexts, and NQTs on supply. Purposive sampling also sought maximum variation and would permit access to relevant cases that could provide depth of information and a nascent understanding not afforded through random sampling (Reybold et al. 2013).

The intention was to identify participants from diverse school contexts, across a range of locations in Wales, in order to establish breadth of experiences to optimise the potential to identify a full scope of features (Ritchie et al. 2014) and "establish maximum variation in the experience of the phenomenon" (Hammarberg et al. 2016, p. 498). Representativeness is not a key determinant of sampling in small scale qualitative research (Moser and Korstjen 2017). A small sample was selected to allow a more detailed exploration of the experiences of NQTs, rather than to specifically focus on variables within the population. However, the sample included a range of participants employed within primary and secondary phases, Welsh medium and English medium schools, as well as an NQT doing supply work, as illustrated in Table 2.

3.6 Recruitment of participants

NQTs in Wales, undergoing induction in the academic year 20/21, were approached using an opt-in strategy, via area leads in all four regional consortia across Wales. An opt-in approach attempted to mitigate for a potential power dynamic that might occur as a result of my dual roles of ITE lecturer and researcher. The first step in the recruitment process was to gain access to an 'a priori' purposive sample (Hood 2007) that met the criteria pertinent to the research question:

- they were an NQT in the academic year 2020/2021 and

- they were teaching in a school in Wales.

Although, as a teacher educator, I had direct access to potential participants, it was decided that given the potential power dynamics at play, due to my role in ITE, it would be more ethical to recruit participants via a third party: the EWC (BERA 2018, Guideline point 19). The reasons for this were threefold. Firstly, the EWC could provide a suitable sampling frame as an organisation holding details of all registered NQTs in Wales (Denscombe 2017). Secondly, attempting direct access was avoided for the ethical purpose of preventing participants feeling obliged to participate (BERA 2018). Thirdly, adopting the EWC as 'gatekeepers' might lend a degree of status to the study and would allow for recruitment from a wider population of NQTs across Wales.

The four regional consortia[2] in Wales, in partnership with the EWC, are responsible for the support of NQTs throughout their induction year. Contact was made, in the first instance, with the area leads for each region, requesting they distribute a letter of information and invitation to participate, to NQTs within their remit. Permission was granted via three consortia, with one consortium failing to respond. Bilingual versions of the participant information sheet and consent form, detailing key information in relation to being involved in the study (Appendix 1), were distributed during August and September 2020 via emails and Twitter. This mode of recruitment proved to be inadequate, generating a single

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[2] There are currently four regional consortia in Wales responsible for supporting schools and local authorities with school improvement: North Wales School Effectiveness Services (**GwE**) (Conwy, Denbighshire, Flintshire, Gwynedd Isle of Anglesey, and Wrexham), **Partneriaeth** (Carmarthenshire, Pembrokeshire and Swansea), Education Achievement Services (**EAS**) (Blaenau, Gwent, Caerphilly, Monmouthshire, Newport and Torfaen) and Central South Consortium (**CSC**) (Bridgend, Cardiff, Merthyr Tydfil, Rhondda Cynon Taf and Vale of Glamorgan).

response, so further attempts to recruit the intended sample size were carried out by sharing the information details and a letter of invitation to participate on the social media platforms Twitter and Facebook, where connections with the teaching profession would enable me to access a wider audience. Additionally, requests to share the information were emailed to headteachers across Wales whose contact details were accessible on local authority lists or the school websites.

3.7 Sample size

There is much debate regarding the optimum sample size in qualitative interviews, with diverse claims based on upon the purpose and types of research conducted (Bryman 2016). Bryman (2016, p. 417) describes achieving the apt sample size as a "delicate balancing act" between a sample being so small that it is difficult to reach "informational redundancy" and too large to conduct "deep, case-oriented analysis" (Sandelowski 1995, p. 179).

A relatively small sample size of ten participants was decided upon to enhance the potential to generate fine-grain data (Crouch and McKenzie 2006) within the time-frames proposed. This allowed for the capacity to conduct detailed interviews, as well as their subsequent transcription and initial analysis, before the next interview was due (approximately one term).

The challenges experienced in establishing an appropriate sample size are perhaps to be expected when attempting to recruit from a profession reporting notoriously high workloads, which were exacerbated during the pandemic (Schleicher and Reimers 2020; Sharp et al. 2020). Furthermore, the issues surrounding NQTs as they undergo induction under normal circumstances were likely to have been heightened in the context of the pandemic (la Velle et al. 2020), adding further complexity to the process of seeking sufficient numbers of appropriate participants willing and able to commit time to the study. Although the intended sample size of 10 was achieved, it was by fortuity, rather than design, that a range of variables were included: seven English medium secondary school teachers, one Welsh medium secondary school teacher, one Welsh medium primary school teacher and one teacher on supply (Table 1).

3.8 Data Collection Methods

Research adopting a pragmatic approach involves the selection of research tools according to their suitability in generating results that are pertinent to the context (Creswell and Plano Clark, 2007). Considering this, in-depth interviews were selected as the optimum method to answer the research questions posed. Interviews offer the potential to capture a person's perspective of experiences (Marshall and Rossman 2016) and elicit detailed accounts of those experiences (Bloomberg and Volpe 2019), which fulfils the purpose of gaining a deeper insight into the lived experiences of NQTs.

In its simplest terms, an interview may be defined as "a discussion with someone in which you try to get information from them" (Thomas 2017, p. 202). However, Kvale and Brinkman's (2015) emphasis on an interview as an 'inter-view' implies a transfer of perspectives and highlights the human interaction that is fundamental in generating knowledge.

In-depth interviews are arguably the most common method of generating qualitative data (Charmaz 2015), holding appeal in their flexibility, and multi-sensory capacity to take into consideration both verbal and non-verbal cues (Cohen et al. 2011). The physical presence and personal contact of an interviewer can potentially motivate participants and help with personal engagement (Thomas 2017), allowing individuals to relate to each other and build a rapport – a significant factor in eliciting deep and meaningful accounts of participants' experiences (Reinharz, 1993; Ryan and Dundon 2008). However, the fact that we arguably live in an "interview society" (Atkinson and Silverman 1997, p. 309) should not allow familiarity with the method to undermine its inherent complexities and the essential skills required to facilitate a good quality interview (Brinkmann 2013).

The level of structure applied to an interview should reflect the purpose of the interview and is an issue of "fitness for purpose" (Cohen et al. 2011, p. 412), which supports the pragmatist underpinnings of this study. Undeniably, highly structured interviews allow for standardisation, thus improving the validity and reliability of the data (Bryman 2016). However, they can fail to capture the dialogical dimensions of knowledge construction intrinsic in conversations between humans (Brinkman 2013). Additionally, whilst unstructured interviews allow the freedom for participants to express their ideas in their

own words, they marginalise the role of the interviewer, and diminish the capacity to utilise the potential of dialogue in the production of knowledge through the use of follow up questions (Brinkmann 2013).

A semi-structured approach was adopted which sought to generate a nuanced understanding and insight into the participants' experiences, rather than standardisation (Bryman 2016). Furthermore, an entirely unstructured approach was rejected in that the researcher required more scope to control the direction of the interview in order to avoid lengthy interviews and potentially irrelevant data (Brinkmann 2013). This is of significance to this study because teacher workload is notoriously high, and the longitudinal research design was already time intensive for participants who were required to participate in multiple interviews. In addition to the well-documented challenges facing NQTs during transition from ITE and throughout their first year of teaching (Mansfield et al. 2014; Heikkinen et al. 2017), the participants in this study experienced induction during the Covid-19 pandemic, which had significantly intensified these challenges (Moorhouse and Kohnke 2021), arguably throwing them into "sharper relief" (la Velle et al. 2020, p. 9). In addition to the challenges of learning to teach, often in new and unfamiliar contexts, they were required to adapt to altered structures to the school day, whilst adapting rapidly to new ways of working both online and through blended learning approaches (Schleicher and Reimers 2020), which may have further amplified workloads (Beames et al. 2021). Furthermore, considering this cohort of NQTs' diminished practical experiences of ITE, as a result of school placements being cut short as a consequence of the first national lockdown in 2020, it would be unsurprising that gaining and developing practical teaching experience in the classroom would take precedence during the data collection period. Minimising demands on the participants' time would therefore be paramount in the context of such substantial and competing priorities, to ensure their continued commitment to the study.

Semi-structured interviews arguably offer the "best of both worlds" in the combination of freedom and structure (Thomas 2011, p. 206), permitting a 'middle ground' between stringency and complete uncertainty to generate detailed information surrounding the experiences of NQTs, without anticipating the results (Winwood 2019). Importantly, a semi-structured interview enabled an emphasis to be placed upon the participants' perception of

their experiences, as NQTs, in this study. (Bryman 2016). However, as previously outlined it was vital not to undermine the inherent complexities of interviewing (Wengraf 2001) and failing to appreciate it as a social encounter where knowledge would be mutually constructed through the act of dialogue (Walford 2001).

Focus group interviews hold the potential to facilitate multiple interviews simultaneously, potentially saving time for the researcher (Thomas 2017); this was an important consideration in the design of this study whereby transcription of the interview data would need to be completed within a limited timeframe, to allow adequate time to respond to the data and potentially adjust the subsequent interview schedule. However, individual interviews were selected over focus groups as a means of data collection, in an attempt to avoid groupthink (Fontana and Frey 2013) and to establish the nuances of a variety of individual experiences of induction in a range of contexts. Ultimately, selecting individual interviews over focus groups would be fortuitous; the unanticipated impact of social distancing measures in response to Covid-19 would have presented significant challenges in bringing participants together over the course of the data collection period. Furthermore, because of Covid-19 regulations, teachers' working patterns had altered significantly and this would have created additional challenges in scheduling group interviews at times that were mutually agreeable for all participants.

Digital online technology is increasingly being used for academic research (Salmons 2015) and offers new potentials, including easing access to some participants because physical proximity is not required (Deakin and Wakefield 2014). Although online interviews were selected over face-to-face interviews primarily for purposes of accessibility and efficient use of time, their use would inadvertently become a significant advantage in the light of the previously unanticipated Covid-19 social distancing measures. Furthermore, conducting interviews online removes the necessity to organise a specified venue and alleviates some of the financial and logistical implications of interviewing in person (Lo Iacono et al. 2016). Using an online platform can be beneficial when participants have busy lives (Cater 2011) and allow for greater versatility when scheduling interviews: both important considerations for teachers working to timetables and busy schedules (Dean and Wakefield 2014), whilst also adjusting to altered working patterns because of Covid-19, as highlighted previously.

Moreover, conducting the interviews online would allow greater efficiency in terms of the researcher's use of time; avoiding potentially lengthy travel times to meet with participants and allowing the added convenience of scheduling interviews around the researcher's own full-time work commitments.

Nevertheless, online interviews can be problematic in that distractions, beyond the control of the interviewer, may compromise the quality of the interview. Furthermore, they have faced criticism for compromising the interviewer's appreciation of non-verbal cues which can enhance communication (Fielding and Thomas 2008) as highlighted earlier. It was important that all participants were comfortable and confident meeting online, and consideration was given to the most appropriate platform in which to conduct the research (Lobe et al. 2020). Microsoft Teams was the preferred choice for the researcher, as it was highly familiar meaning the researcher's skills in using it should minimise the potential for technical issues to compromise the collection of data.

Ash (2013, p. 20) highlights the potential of technology to create "spacio-temporal atmospheres" that influence the participants within them. Accordingly, it was considered important to utilise online platforms that participants were also familiar and comfortable with. Thus, participants were provided with the opportunity to meet on an online platform of their choice. Fortunately, all participants were familiar and experienced with the Teams online platform, as a result of the pandemic which would likely further minimise the occurrence of technical difficulties (Archibald et al. 2019). Arguably, participants conversant with the technology used renders it less visible (Ash 2013), and thus potentially less likely to impinge on their sense of ease and willingness to share their experiences.

Online interviews have been criticised in terms of the greater challenges they may present in establishing rapport, between the interviewer and the interviewee, compared to face-to-face interviews (Lo Iacono et al. 2016; Cater 2011), an important factor in generating rich data of personal experiences (McGrath et al. 2019). However, Deakin and Wakefield's (2014) study, investigating PhD students' use of Skype to conduct interviews, challenges this perspective, reporting that rapport was developed more rapidly with some interviewees,

alongside improved receptiveness. It could be argued that the skills of the interviewer are most crucial here (McGrath et al. 2019).

A fundamental aspect of successful interviewing is the quality of interaction between the researcher and participant, in addition to the researcher's aptitude in asking "good questions" (Bloomberg and Volpe 2019, p. 192). Interview schedules were created for each round of interviews to ensure that appropriate questions were posed that would generate detailed and relevant data (Denscombe 2009). With careful planning and preparation, schedules can potentially improve the rigour of the interview as a research tool and heighten the trustworthiness of the data in terms of its accuracy in capturing the phenomena under investigation (Kallio et al. 2016). Using a schedule allowed the researcher a degree of control over the content and direction of the interview by implementing pre-determined questions and broad themes pertinent to the research question and the reading undertaken in the literature review (Thomas 2017). It acted as a flexible framework in which the researcher could be responsive to spontaneous and unanticipated lines of inquiry, as well as probe participants for clarity, explanation or finer details (Adams 2015).

The introductory interviews were scheduled at the earliest opportunity following the commencement of induction, in order to capture the early experiences of participants at the crucial point of transition from trainee teacher to NQT. Furthermore, considering the difficulties in recruiting participants outlined earlier, prompt engagement was vital to establish relationships with them that might secure their commitment to the study which would take place over a sustained period of time. In addition to the thematic framing of the interview schedule, flexibility was allowed to develop a relationship dynamic between the researcher and the interviewee (Kvale and Brinkmann 2015), considered important to effective research (Delamont 2002). This remained a fundamental aspect of the interview process in the subsequent three rounds of interviews (Appendices 2, 3 and 4). Supporting questions, notes and prompts were included in each schedule to ensure the capture of relevant and detailed data. Furthermore, a flexible approach was adopted to allow exploration of unanticipated, but relevant lines of inquiry, and thus avoid potential limiting of data as a result of researcher expectations (Hammarberg et al. 2016).

Flexibility within each interview was concurrent with a degree of flexibility between each round of interviews, allowing the researcher to respond to themes that may emerge in the data generated. Thus, the direction of the study was responsive to the participants' experiences and perceptions of reality, acknowledging that these may be fluid and change over time. Transcription of the interview data took place promptly following each round of interviews and was carried out personally by the researcher. Personally transcribing the interviews ensured that I could bring my knowledge and understanding to the phenomena under investigation, gained through my experiences as a mentor and teacher educator, providing an assurance that what was written was an accurate account, which might have been compromised if the transcription had been outsourced or undertaken using digital software (McMullin 2021). Furthermore, having personally conducted the interviews, during the transcription process, I was able to "actively reflect" on the data (Nasheeda et al. 2019, p. 3) and consider not just the words that the participants uttered, but the ways in which they had been presented – including non-verbal cues such as tone of voice and gestures – which can significantly influence the meanings that are attached to those words (McMullin 2021). The process, although time-consuming, allowed for greater early immersion with the data (Davidson 2017: Merriam and Tisdell 2016), allowing the researcher to "live" the data in the ongoing process of establishing meaningful patterns (Moser and Korstjens 2018, p. 15). Consequently, subsequent interview schedules were designed to incorporate emerging themes that aligned with the participants' experiences and addressed any gaps in the data.

3.8.1 Interview Round 1

Questions posed during this initial meeting were based upon themes that had emerged through reviewing the literature surrounding the experiences of NQTs, that informed the research questions (Appendix 2).

The first key theme explored was NQTs' previous experiences of mentoring and perceptions of the mentoring role, along with their expectations of mentoring support for the coming year. It was intended to gain a sense of the types of mentoring encountered during ITE and how these may have potentially shaped the participants' pre-conceptions surrounding

mentoring during induction. These questions were posed on the basis of Huberman's (1993) concept that new information and experiences are interpreted through existing frameworks of knowledge and experience, thus new experiences of mentoring as NQTs may be moulded by prior experiences of mentoring during ITE. Furthermore, the inconsistencies in induction for NQTs are well-documented (Waters 2020), thus these research questions also endeavoured to gain an early indication of how provision for induction, including mentoring, was experienced by these NQTs.

The following question sought to establish a sense of the school contexts in which the NQTs were employed. The value that a school places upon professional learning and the mentoring of NQTs holds significant implications for NQTs' sense of identity, professional growth and continued commitment to the profession (Ingersoll and Strong 2011), important because the problem of teacher retention persists in Wales (Ghosh and Worth 2020). A further theme explored here was NQTs' prior experiences of engaging in research. Establishing a research-informed teaching profession features highly in the education reform agenda in Wales (Furlong 2015; WG 2017b) and the purpose of this line of questioning was to establish how participants' research literacy skills might have been developed during ITE. This is significant considering Furlong's (2015, p. 32) recommendations that ITE programmes need to support trainee teachers in becoming both "consumers *of*" as well as "participants *in*" (author's emphasis) research, this having implications for longer term research capacity of both the participants and the wider education system (Furlong 2015).

The final question posed sought to determine whether communication and relationships with ITE colleagues and tutors had continued as the participants moved on to their induction year, enduring connections with ITE providers, colleagues from placement schools and peers being considered crucial to successful transition (Gordon 2020).

3.8.2 Interview Round 2
The second round of interviews was scheduled during early December 2020, at the end of the autumn term and aimed to establish a deeper sense of the mentoring experiences of the participants and how these might have shaped their teaching practice or ways of

thinking about their practice, having almost completed a full term of teaching (Appendix 3). The questions posed sought to consolidate the data collected in the first round surrounding mentoring provision to establish whether inconsistencies, indicated in the literature (Waters 2020), had persisted. Much of the policy that surrounds the education reform agenda in Wales implies aspirations for a "new type of professionalism" (Furlong 2015, p.6) where teachers embrace and lead change (Furlong 2015), bringing "fresh ideas" rather than merely accepting the status quo (Donaldson 2015; Waters 2020, p. 6). This holds implications for the ways in which mentoring may be enacted and the questions posed next intended to explore how NQTs experience these. Thus, subsequent questions sought to examine how NQTs experienced key aspects of the education reform agenda, including the employment of the professional standards, in addition to engagement with inquiry-based practice (WG 2017c), and an investigation into the ways in which mentoring might support these.

A further key theme explored here was NQTs' experiences of professional learning within diverse school contexts. The questions intended to establish further data on schools' approaches to professional learning and mentoring practice, at a point where NQTs had had a term to acculturalise and gain a deeper appreciation of established practices and approaches within their school context. A key element to be explored within this theme was to what extent and how NQTs experience collaboration with others as part of their professional learning and development.

3.8.3 Interview Round 3

The third round of interviews was scheduled at the end of the spring term, during March 2021 (Appendix 4). The initial questions posed here sought to clarify and probe for further information surrounding themes that had emerged in the first two rounds of interviews. For example, regarding mentoring experiences, NQTs had previously recounted some confusion over roles and responsibilities of members of staff who were supporting them, and it was important to ensure my accuracy in establishing what mentoring was being experienced and with whom. The questions attempted to elicit further details surrounding the ways in which NQTs had experienced formal mentoring in the interim period. Furthermore, responding to participants' previous accounts of the diverse range of support experienced, the questions

sought to investigate their experiences of more informal types of mentoring that may have a significant impact in supporting their professional learning (Shanks 2018).

Continuing to focus on the theme of professional learning, further questions within this interview schedule attempted to explore the participants' experiences of being observed and receiving feedback, to support the development of their teaching practice. The intention was to consider to what extent these processes supported transformation of practice, rather than transmission. It also sought to further appreciate the extent to which feedback might be experienced as a form of "judgementoring" (Hobson and Malderez 2013, p. 89).

Subsequent questions intended to establish an understanding of the participants' continued ways of engaging with the professional standards and the role of the mentor in supporting this; the key purpose of this line of inquiry was to investigate, after two terms of teaching experience, the extent to which the standards were experienced as an accountability measure or as a meaningful framework for supporting professional learning and developing practice (Mockler and Stacey 2021).

The final questions within interview 3 aimed to consolidate an understanding of school contexts, particularly the extent to which NQTs felt a sense of belonging and being valued within their school communities. The literature suggests that school context can have a significant impact upon NQTs' sense of growing professional identity (Ingersoll and Strong 2011; Attard Tonna 2021), as well as continued commitment to the profession, a persistent dilemma in Wales (Ghosh and Worth 2020).

3.8.4 Interview Round 4

The final round of interviews was scheduled towards the end of the academic year, taking place in late June and early July 2021 (Appendix 5). A key intention of the final interview was to give the participants an opportunity to sum up their experiences of induction and whether it had met the expectations that they had identified in the initial interview at the start of the study. It further provided an opportunity for participants to reflect upon their experiences and consider their aspirations for the future. Questions posed at this final stage

also sought to build upon the key themes explored in the previous interviews, significantly experiences of professional learning and mentoring, to investigate if the ways in which participants experienced the enactment of policy, focused on professional learning and mentoring, had altered over time.

A key finding that had pervaded the data collected from the previous interviews of all the participants was the immense and ubiquitous impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on their experiences during both their ITE and induction year. Consequently, questions were posed in this final interview that specifically aimed to clarify previous accounts and probe for finer details of the impact of Covid-19 on their professional learning and how mentoring activities might have supported this.

3.9 Analysis of data

Reflexive thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006) was considered an appropriate approach to analysing the data in that it permits the researcher to identify, analyse and report on patterns within the data that will address the research questions. The approach acknowledges the significance of a researcher's subjectivity as a "resource" within the analysis (Braun and Clarke 2019, p. 3) and their reflexive involvement with theory, data and its interpretation (Braun and Clarke 2013). Not being strongly affiliated to a particular epistemological approach affords a flexibility appropriate to the pragmatist stance adopted here. A theme may be described as an "idea or concept" that represents a synthesis of codes captured in the data, representing meaningful and recurring patterns (Braun and Clarke 2019, p. 4). The thematic analysis framework adopted here incorporated six stages: familiarisation with the data; generation of initial codes; the establishment of themes; reviewal and development of themes, and finally the writing up process (Braun and Clarke, 2006).

The initial step of the analysis process involved verbatim transcription of the video recordings, which occurred promptly in the days following the interviews to ensure that a sense of the 'live' event remained captured. Despite being a time-consuming process (McGrath et al. 2018), as previously indicated, personally undertaking the transcription afforded a more immediate familiarisation and deeper immersion in the data, to establish

an overall sense of the data and potentially generate "emergent insight" (Bloomberg and Volpe 2019, p. 237). Actively engaging in the transcription process and frequently revisiting the audio-video format, to cross-reference intonation and paralinguistics, allowed me to ensure that the written transcription reflected the intended meaning of the participants as accurately as possible (Gibson and Brown 2009).

In order to make sense of the data, I read and re-read the transcripts, highlighting details in the text in relation to the research question, as a form of initial open coding. During this stage, I also annotated the texts with notes identifying interesting and relevant facets and posing pertinent questions, eliciting features of the participants' responses that were deemed of significance to the research question (Corbin and Strauss 1998) (Appendix 6). It furthermore enabled me to establish potential links between participants' responses and data generated from other rounds of interviews within the study. It also allowed me to identify what might be missing from the data (Bernards et al. 2017).

The digital software NVivo was utilised, predominantly as a means of organising the interview data. Using the software to input data acted as a supplementary coding process (Maher et al. 2018) and facilitated further engagement and "thematizing" (Kvale and Brinkmann 2015, p. 105). However, out of personal preference, I reverted to the physical use of notes and Post-Its (Appendix 7) as part of the "winnowing process" (Seidman 2013, p. 118) of reducing what had been collected into a "manageable data base" and organising ideas in meaningful ways (Bloomberg and Volpe 2019, p. 238). My decision to revert to physical handling of the data aligns with Maher et al.'s (2018) claim that digital software such as NVivo may not fully support the analysis process, holding the potential to compromise the researcher's ability to conceptualise the data. However, the data inputted into NVivo were accessed further on in the analysis process, to draw upon examples of themes and initial codes in preparation for writing up my findings.

This process was supplemented by completing a Summary Participant Form for each interview (Appendix 8). Based on the Contact Summary Sheet (Miles and Huberman 1994; Saldana 2016), the form is intended to record the key information from each interview, limited ideally to no more than one side of A4, under the keys themes or lines on inquiry

forming the basis of the interview schedule. This supported me in condensing and organising the data into a succinct and readily accessible format, acting as a form of indexing where I could quickly locate recurring themes and patterns in the data, potentially avoiding the lengthy process of multiple re-readings of entire transcripts. Thus, the process of reflecting and reinterpreting the significance of data over time was more expeditious. Initial codes were revisited, adopting a reflexive and analytical approach, with broad themes and ideas being subsequently synthesised with concepts and theories explored within the literature review and pertinent to the research question. The process of revisiting themes and adjusting them was repeated, with close reference to the original transcripts and video recordings. This iterative process ensured that my engagement with the data was meticulous and detailed, and final key themes were defined in advance of writing up my analysis.

A key phase in the process of analysis was the collation of data into individual pen-portraits of each NQT in the study. Organising the data in this way allowed me to further immerse myself in their narratives and was critical in catalysing my developing thoughts and reflections; it allowed me to view emerging themes as part of each participant's individual account and afforded me a more nuanced appreciation of their experiences during induction.

3.10 Ethical Considerations

Formal ethical approval was applied for and received in June 2020 from Cardiff University's Social Research Ethics Committee (Appendix 9), following BERA (2018) guidelines. Although the approval process highlighted anticipated ethical dilemmas and potential means of mitigating for them, as indicated earlier, the emergent and fluid nature of qualitative research involves unique and complex ethical considerations (Roth and von Unger 2018) that require attention throughout the entirety of the research project (Preissle 2008, cited in Given 2008; BERA 2018).

Informed consent was gained from each participant at the start of the project in accordance with BERA (2018) guidelines. Potential participants were invited to take part via the regional consortia, social media, and direct contact with headteachers. An opt-in process of consent

was adopted to avoid potential participants feeling under pressure to take part, an ethical issue that might be exacerbated because of my role as a Senior Lecturer in ITE. Whilst consent indicates the agreement of participants to take part in the study, their understanding of what they are agreeing to is vital (Thomas 2017), and thus details of the nature of the study were distributed to potential participants, in an information sheet (Appendix 1), prior to the start of the study. The information sheet included details of the purpose and rationale of the study, as well as expectations of participants, including the number of interviews scheduled and their approximate intended duration, as well as the participants' right to withdraw without explanation or repercussions. Further information provided included details regarding how the confidentiality and anonymity within the data and analysis would be ensured, in accordance with General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR) (2018), in addition to the contact details of the researcher and university supervisors. These details were reiterated and expanded upon at the beginning of each interview, where participants were informed that confidentiality and anonymity within the data and analysis would be ensured, with electronic data being stored on a secure computer network and paper-based information, including annotated transcripts, being stored in a secure cabinet at my home premises. Furthermore, verbal ongoing consent was established at the beginning of each interview where participants were also reminded of their right to withdraw at any point.

3.11 Ethical Issues Surrounding my Positionality

A fundamental consideration surrounding the potential ethical dilemmas that might be encountered during this study was the impact of my multiple positions, both as an insider and outsider, to the research participants and their contexts, which may ultimately influence the process of collection and interpretation of the data (Holmes 2020). Positionality describes the stance that the researcher adopts in approaching a study and embodies their ontological and epistemological assumptions, in addition to beliefs they hold regarding the ways in which people interact and relate to the environment they exist in (Ormston, et al. 2014; Grix 2018). Sultana (2007) argues that in order to undertake research ethically, it is vital to pay heed to positionality and the role of reflexivity as a continuous process in identifying and articulating this. Social research processes can rarely be regarded as wholly impartial (Carr 2000), in that a researcher's positionality pervades all aspects of

the research process (Foote and Bartell 2011); researchers are unavoidably a part of the social world that they are investigating (Hammersley and Atkinson 1995; Malterud 2001). However, recognising and communicating positionality may help to diminish, although not eliminate, researcher bias (Rowe 2014). Savin-Baden and Major (2013) present three essential means by which researchers might consider positionality: their positionality regarding the subject, the participants and the research process itself, each of which will be explored in turn.

3.11.1 Positionality regarding the focus of the study

The inception of the research focus stems from my previous experiences as both an induction mentor and NQT, having access to both an in-school induction mentor as well as an external mentor, as part of the MEP. These experiences have shaped my expectations surrounding what effective mentoring might look like and have been further influenced in my reading for the literature review. Such positionality, whilst advantageous in terms of my knowledge surrounding the concepts of mentoring, may pose ethical dilemmas for the research process. My previous experiences of being a mentor and mentee hold value in that I have a shared experience with participants and can relate to their issues and dilemmas. This can help in eliciting rich data in that I have insight into pertinent questions to ask and where it is appropriate to probe for further information. However, assuming a shared understanding poses the risk of marginalising the participants' voices by overlooking their understandings of events and applying my own. Delamont (2002) poses that researchers should seek to understand, rather than eradicate these effects. Consequently, re-visiting the video recordings when transcribing the interviews and analysing the data, provided an opportunity for reflexivity regarding my positionality and its impact upon the construction of meaning and interpretation of events (Delamont 2002).

3.11.2 Positionality surrounding the participants

It is widely acknowledged that establishing a rapport with participants is vital in generating rich data in qualitative interviews (Reinharz 1992). The longitudinal design of this study held the potential to facilitate further development of relationships, allowing participants time to feel more at ease in divulging information. However, maintaining an appropriate balance between demonstrating my active engagement with the participants' experiences, and

empathising with them, was problematic. A few of the participants were already familiar to me, being part of the previous cohort of student teachers within my institution, and this can be problematic (Braun and Clark 2013). Arguably, I was emotionally invested in their progress from the outset, making it difficult to maintain the researcher role without reverting to a mentor role. The same dilemma presented itself with participants who were previously unfamiliar to me; as relationships developed, I became increasingly invested in their experiences, demonstrating how positionality can also shift over time (Holmes 2020). This was particularly challenging when witnessing accounts of some of the difficulties participants were experiencing that were significantly impacting upon their well-being and professional development. This included one participant who resigned from their post because of lack of support and another who failed to secure a permanent post on re-applying for her job. Empathising with their circumstances, it was difficult not to feel protective over them as they faced the difficulties of continuing to work in contexts that they perceived had treated them unfairly and which held no future for them.

3.11.3 Positionality regarding the research process and context

Following the initial difficulties in recruiting an appropriate sample, adopting a longitudinal design presents further challenges regarding attrition of participants over time (Thomas 2017). This became a source of concern when one participant failed to respond to an invitation to the second interview, and a further participant became increasingly difficult to pin down, cancelling scheduled meetings at the last minute with delayed responses to email communication. It was important to avoid participants feeling under pressure to participate, particularly in light of my position as a lecturer in ITE, and to respect the participants' right to withdraw without consequences (BERA 2018).

Interviews, as a research method, pose ethical issues in that the researcher is an "instrument for data collection" (Salmons 2012, p. 2) in a context that is hierarchical in that the researcher is in control (Braun and Clarke 2013). Consequently, it was important to be mindful that my roles as both researcher and teacher educator could place me in the position of 'expert' in the field which may have implications for how participants felt they could respond. Exerting too much authority may encourage participants to affirm my stance or opinion, or potentially close down the discussion (Braun and Clarke 2013). Thus, it was

important to foreground the participants as the 'experts' of their own unique experiences (Braun and Clarke 2013), the principal focus of this study.

A further ethical dilemma presented itself regarding participants' rights and well-being. As the study progressed, the duration of each interview for all participants increased. This may potentially be attributed to an accumulation of experiences as NQTs over time, resulting in lengthier and more detailed responses. Furthermore, the increasing trust and familiarity built up between the researcher and participants throughout the duration of the study may have increased participants' confidence and ease to provide greater detail when narrating their experiences. The initial information sheet for participants suggested that interviews were expected to last between twenty and thirty minutes. However, all follow-up interviews were significantly lengthier than this, some in excess of one hour and fifteen minutes, and this is particularly problematic when interviewing NQTs whose time, as outlined earlier, is particularly precious. Despite my hope for further insights into NQTs' experiences, interviews were paused after approximately thirty minutes and participants were given an opportunity to end the interview without repercussions.

Chapter 4: Findings and Discussion

The aim of this study was to develop meaningful understandings of the lived experiences of newly qualified teachers during their first year of teaching in Wales, with a particular focus on their experiences of being mentored during this period. Qualitative data were collected from 4 rounds of in-depth, semi-structured interviews, conducted termly, with an initial sample of 10 NQTs in Wales, which diminished to 9 after the first round of interviews. Five key findings emerged from the data:

1. The significant impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on NQTs' experiences of induction, including mentoring.

2. NQTs' understandings of the induction mentor role lacked clarity, with their experiences of being mentored during their NQT year seeming to be highly variable and largely inadequate in terms of their professional formation.

3. Mentoring to support NQTs' professional learning was predominantly instrumental rather than educative.

4. NQTs' experiences are situated within, and heavily impacted by, school context.

5. Informal mentoring and support opportunities were perceived by NQTs to be valuable in terms of their practice.

Each finding will be discussed in turn under discrete subheadings for the purpose of clarity. However, it is important to acknowledge the potential artifice of this method of organisation as each finding is intrinsically linked, potentially impacting upon each other in multiple and complex ways, a typical feature of this type of qualitative approach (Aspers and Corte 2019).

Whilst the order in which the findings are presented is not indicative of their level of significance, the unanticipated and pervasive consequences of the Covid-19 pandemic is a crosscutting theme. It needs to be acknowledged this created atypical experiences of mentoring and induction for all in this cohort of NQTs. The findings regarding this are therefore presented first to provide important context.

4.1 Finding1: The significant impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on NQTs' experiences of induction, including mentoring.

4.1.1 Changes in Induction Policy

The experiences of NQTs in the 2020/2021 cohort were minimised and compromised to varying degrees as a result of time lost in school during periods of lockdown or self-isolation, and in school where they were required to adhere to policies such as maintaining a specific distance from pupils and wearing a mask. For contingency purposes and in acknowledgement of the challenges of working in these pandemic precipitated conditions, requirements for induction were altered by WG for this cohort in two significant ways. Firstly, the number of pieces of evidence required of NQTs to evidence a standard was reduced from two to one, effectively halving the requirements of previous cohorts.

> *'we had to evidence only one or two links to each standard now obviously because we've lost so much time.'*
>
> *(Esme, I.4).*

The other key change in policy was the reduction in the minimum number of sessions required to complete induction from 380 sessions to a minimum of 110 (WG 2020), reducing the sessions needed to qualify to less than a third of what was previously required. The policy was presented as a reasonable adjustment, given the pandemic, that would permit "flexibility" (WG 2020, p. 3) for those NQTs who had successfully met the professional standards but were unable to complete the induction period within the academic year, as a result of Covid-19 limiting their teaching experiences. This, however, had the unintended consequence of also compromising support for some NQTs in their first year as professionals, as some who completed induction by the end of the spring term started their role as a fully qualified teacher after the Easter break.

> *'... because I've hit, well they've said I've hit enough of the standards, all of the standards at least once, sometimes twice, they're saying that you do have enough stuff there showing that we can pass you a lot earlier. I think they were, I think initially they were going to be flexible on it because of covid situations and obviously schools not being open, so they've been quite good about it.'*
>
> *(Julie, I.3)*

Julie presented as a dynamic and ambitious new teacher, who at the time of her early completion of induction, was excited at the '*flexibility*' that the new regulations allowed her to potentially accelerate her progress (Julie, I.3). However, by the time of our final interview, having completed a full term as a fully qualified teacher, she expressed her reservations about her premature completion of induction:

> '*Knowing how intense it is I may have said I'll have the whole year's support rather than finishing at Easter... I would have liked it to have gone towards June/July time rather than April, just to feel a little bit more supported.*'

> *(Julie, I.4)*

She also highlighted how her new school was delighted when she informed them that she had completed induction early because '*it means we can add more lessons onto your timetable*' (Julie, I.4).

4.1.2 Diminished experiences during ITE

All NQT participants identified the impact the Covid-19 pandemic had in curtailing their teaching experiences during their PGCE year. As a consequence of the first lockdown in March 2020, participants were denied the opportunity to undergo their final practical teaching experience (PTE) and were mindful at the outset of induction of not having had any teaching experience for approximately 5 months. Gabby described her NQT year as '*a baptism of fire*', explaining that:

> '*...obviously we didn't have our second placement. So, for me, I wasn't in front of a class – the first week of in February last year we finished our PTE1 and then I wasn't in front of a class again until the start of this academic year. So, there was quite a chunk where I'd felt I'd not been a teacher so maybe that's why it felt like a bit of a culture shock when we started our NQT year*'

> *(Gabby, I.3)*

Several participants expressed that the truncated experience of teaching face-to-face during their PGCE had left them feeling inadequately prepared to start their NQT year; Jane described how she felt '*half-trained*' (Jane, I.4) and Rachel reported:

'…the first term of my NQT year was like my second placement and that I definitely wasn't ready to qualify looking back.'

(Rachel, I.4)

The well documented sense of 'reality shock' (Veenman 1984; Voss and Kunter 2020; Hobson and Malderez 2013) had clearly been heightened by the shortened experience during these NQTs' PGCE year. This appears to be a consequence of the absence of a gradual accumulation of teaching hours that trainee teachers normally experience when they start their second teaching placement. Participants reported concern in moving from a highly reduced timetable of approximately 50% in PTE1 to 90% of a full teaching timetable during the induction year.

'I remember when I did my first placement, by the end I was only doing about 50-70% because I missed … building it up in the second placement.'

(Eleanor,I.4).

Missing their second placement also diminished NQTs' range of experiences, including experiencing an alternative school context, in addition to the experience of teaching a range of phases/stages and abilities. Several participants highlighted their induction school's acknowledgement of their limited experience and the NQTs' perceptions of this were conflicting. Lucy reported a supportive experience:

'The school was very aware that we'd only had like half a placement. If we needed anything they were there to help, not judge our teaching...the headteacher said to the NQTs [at the start of the year] this is essentially your second placement this term. So, take your own time to get into it and the swing of things.'

(Lucy, I.4).

However, John framed this in more negative terms:

'It's very difficult for me to assess its [Covid's] impact but based upon the couple of pieces of feedback that I've had across the year where someone says oh, we're conscious of the fact that you've missed out on experiences because of Covid and that means you're expected to be shit because you've missed out on this time.'

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4.1.3 Inequities in experience resulting from diverse school responses to Covid-19

Government guidance to schools regarding regulations intended to control the spread of the virus, recognised that schools' responses and enactments of these regulations would vary between contexts; this variation therefore impacted upon NQTs' experiences in diverse ways. Many schools adopted the strategy of keeping pupils 'in bubbles' in the same classroom all day whilst teachers moved from room to room. Although this impacted upon all teaching staff, NQTs in this study reported it presented notable challenges because of their lack of experience.

> *'... you're turning up in rooms where the projector doesn't work, or the internet crashes, or the speakers don't work and then for us, as NQTs, it's really hard to have anything to fall back on because you know, we don't have the experience of that. We don't have any other resources to access.'*
>
> *(Gabby,I.1).*

Participants highlighted additional challenges surrounding behaviour management, a common concern for novice teachers (Hudson 2012), that they felt emanated from requirements for social distancing measures to be applied. Esme explained how moving between classes had meant that the start of lessons felt '*a little bit rushed*' and this had prevented her from effectively establishing her '*expectations*' of pupils (Esme, I.2). Gabby described not being able to use '*'go to' tactics*' regarding classroom management because circulating the room was prohibited (Gabby, I.1). Jane, working on supply, reported experiencing particular challenges in managing classes that were unknown to her, often in unfamiliar contexts which offered varying degrees of support. By the end of the first term, the perceived lack of support from Senior Leadership Teams (SLTs), significantly with behaviour management, had resulted in her questioning her continued commitment to the teaching profession. She regretted missing her second placement which she felt would have been a potentially a more challenging context:

> *'maybe [it] would have really helped me with behaviour management and maybe I'd be in a better position now as well … I think I'd probably have an easier time if it wasn't for all the Covid restrictions and things going on but at the same time it's not making me want to do it really.'*

Many participants reported the additional workload that resulted in moving to teaching lessons online.

> *'You know it's taking me 2 to 3 times longer to plan and prep a lesson to deliver it remotely, be that synchronous or asynchronous, than it would if I was face-to-face. And you know, remote learning fatigue is a real thing … being stuck in this room and sat at this desk all day. It would get to the evening, and it would be like I actually can't sit at my computer screen and do any more work.'*
>
> *(Gabby, I.3).*

Eleanor claimed the workload was '*horrific*' and described feelings of isolation and the impact of working online on her health and well-being:

> *'I used to cry about twice a week, but all the other teachers did as well because it was so much ...I was scared to shut the laptop in case I missed an email you know, or a phone call came. So, I did feel like a lot of pressure.'*
>
> *(Eleanor, I.3)*

Richard expressed a lack of confidence in readjusting to face-to-face teaching after a lengthy period of lockdown in the spring term, and suggested that this might be more challenging for novice teachers than those who had been in the profession for some time:

> *'So, there's lots of things that we're doing every day that we haven't done since November … for someone who is new to it like me...for people who have been teaching for years, that period of time from November is a very, very small percentage of their total in teaching experience. And for me that's a much larger percentage of my experience, you know. And I worry... I've got lots of nerves about how good I am, be it when I come to being in front of the kids again and things like that.'*
>
> *(Richard, I.3)*

4.1.4 The impact of Covid-19 on mentoring activities to support professional learning

Opportunities for, and experiences of, mentoring were compromised in several ways as a result of the pandemic. Most participants highlighted that mentoring meetings became less of a priority as the year progressed, dwindling in duration and frequency. This was partially attributed to completion of the PLP (in part because less evidence was required) and the growing independence of NQTs, although it was evident that there were other reasons that mentors seemed to have less time, including competing responsibilities as part of their senior roles. Eleanor reported how her mentor, a member of the senior leadership team, had to prioritise compliance with Covid-19 regulations, and described how this impacted upon opportunities to meet:

> *'It's a bit different now with Covid. Because we've had a case now within our school, she couldn't come to see me last week because we really had to up our game with PPE and the two-metre rule and stuff.'*
>
> *(Eleanor, I.1)*

Many participants reported that mentor meetings had become less of a priority during lockdown periods. Esme described how communication became less frequent and more ad hoc after the lockdown period during the spring term of 2021:

> *'After that then, sort of through lockdown, we sort of had a catch-up call now and again when we could, just to see how everything's going...we didn't meet up [when in school] over that period of time through lockdown. It was just sort of Teams calls and quick catch ups if we needed.'*
>
> *(Esme, I.4)*

John faced significant challenges because Covid-19 regulations impacted upon the accessibility of his mentor who was situated on a different campus and, although some meetings took place online, they were unable to meet in person:

> *'I haven't been able to see her in person – that's been the only problem. I'm missing that. When you have the mentor in the school you can just go and talk to them.'*
>
> *(John, I.1)*

Participants also reported that Covid-19 had impacted upon NQTs' opportunities for informal mentoring, typically enabled through collaboration with school colleagues and being part of a community both within and beyond the school. In many contexts the staffroom was no longer available for use and the forced (although understandable) segregation created a sense of solitude and isolation for NQTs. In addition to this, informal networking opportunities were also greatly restricted (e.g. informal conversations between teachers at sports fixtures):

> *'I think it's taken away a sense of community. Thinking of the staffroom, I think that's huge in the school and I've never actually been to the staffroom because it's not, it's out of use. And yeah so, I think it's impacted in terms of physical support as well.'*
>
> *(Rachel, I.4)*

> *'I think...that we're all feeling incredibly isolated, that we are feeling quite alone...um...in terms of not being able to share feedback on our lessons or have again a sort of chat, a conversation about the school, a conversation with an adult, share any issues with behaviours or successes.'*
>
> *(Marcus, I.1)*

4.1.5 Challenges in evidencing some aspects of the Professional Learning Passport (PLP)

As a direct consequence of the pandemic, many participants reported that opportunities for extending their range of teaching experiences were further compromised, resulting in greater challenges in evidencing specific professional standards in their PLPs. For example, regulations regarding classroom layout and social distancing presented challenges in developing innovative practice. At the end of the spring term, Lucy explained how she hadn't *'been able to trial and error much'* (Lucy, I.3), and Rachel reported experiencing less *'flexibility to try new things'* in her teaching (Rachel, I.3). Most participants experienced minimal time teaching face-to-face between the second round of interviews at Christmas and the third round at the end of the spring term, due to a lengthy period of lockdown. Some participants experienced further time away from school to self-isolate or care for family and Jane, working on supply, was put on furlough for the entire spring term.

In addition to the challenges faced in acquiring experiences, participants also struggled to physically evidence some of the standards required for their PLP, because pupils' work, an important source of evidence, was not always easily accessible because books had to be quarantined to avoid cross-contamination. Consequently, blank templates and resources were uploaded to the PLP as exemplars rather than completed pieces of work. Esme explained:

> *'I wouldn't say it's actually been too difficult to actually think of the ideas [experiences] and link them but actual physical evidence where you have to upload the pictures or documents, that's been a little tricky because when I've used something such as the work that we've done in class and things, we've not been allowed to touch the pupils' books...so I was a bit unsure of how we were meant to physically evidence these things when I can't get evidence. So, we just had to think of ways around it.'*

(Esme, I.4)

Many schools did not conduct parents' evenings and Lucy highlighted how she had needed to be more strategic in evidencing some standards, including involving partners in learning:

> *'There's one I think it's about involving partners in learning and it's about parents and because we've not had parents' evening so I'm thinking right I need to do a phone call home you know.'*

(Lucy, I.3)

4.1.6 Variations in the number of observations and opportunities for feedback

A key concern expressed by all participants was the limitation that Covid-19 regulations placed on opportunities to both be observed and observe others' teaching practice. Restrictions placed upon the number of adults allowed in a classroom varied between school contexts, resulting in inconsistencies in the number of observations that NQTs experienced with both mentors and the SLT. Significantly, some NQTs did not experience a single formal observation through the entirety of their induction year. The lack of frequent

observations and feedback was also highlighted as a significant concern in the transition from ITE to induction.

> *'I think the biggest adjustment has been going from having someone watch you and give you feedback every lesson to nothing at all and you're just there by yourself'.*
>
> *(Lucy, I.1)*

Although many participants held reservations about the need for observations, largely because of the additional stress and increased workload, all participants acknowledged that observations and subsequent feedback were vital to their professional learning and development. Esme, who was not formally observed during the induction year, explained that removing the pressure of observations had allowed her to focus on establishing herself as a teacher, but she recognised the importance of monitoring her progress:

> *'I've got mixed feelings on it [lack of observations] to be honest. Part of me is kind of thinking well now, when I do get round to being observed I'm going to be a bit of a mess because what if what I'm doing doesn't seem to be right. Part of me thinks I'm glad because I've been able to settle, get used to the class and build a bit of a relationship. It is however a bit worrying'*
>
> *(Esme, I.2).*

Gabby, who was observed once during the induction year, shared similar concerns about the impact on her professional learning and development having not had follow up observations:

> *'…they've told us if we only have one observation this year, that's fine but personally, for me, I don't feel confident only having someone watch me teach once. Like I think it would build my confidence if I were able to have the chance to have – even different people, different times, watching me teach to sort of give me that feedback so that I know that I'm on the right track with something and I also know what I can improve on and if I'm completely off the mark.'*
>
> *(Gabby, I.3)*

Responses to facilitating observations of NQTs, whilst remaining compliant with social distancing regulations, varied between contexts. Rachel and Gabby explained how their

mentors observed them teaching from the doorway of the classroom which Rachel described as feeling *'odd'* (Rachel, I.3). Esme explained her mentor's intention to observe her teaching using a video recording of her lesson, although the opportunity never materialised. Richard described the benefits of his mentor adopting a more frequent and informal approach to observing his practice and explained:

> *'She pops in for observations every now and then. I have a sort of learning journal like I had when I was on PGCE which she writes in and that's, especially as I missed most of PTE2, it's been tremendously important just to have that feedback on what I'm doing now.'*
>
> *(Richard, I.2).*

Some mentors conducted 'hybrid' observation experiences rather than observing teaching online or not observing NQTs at all. These involved mentors facilitating critical discussions with their mentees around a hypothetical lesson, presented through a PowerPoint presentation or lesson plan. Following discussions surrounding the rationale of their planning decisions, NQTs were subsequently provided with valuable feedback on the thinking behind their practice, despite not having been physically observed.

> *'My mentor has been really good about it...she was going to ask to observe a lesson where I was teaching kids, but she thought that might be a bit too much pressure and you don't always get the right vibe from teaching online... So, I did a presentation and showed her everything I've done whilst online, how I've progressed the students, how I've done assessments. How I've made sure the children were engaged. That was quite a nice thing that she did rather than just saying right I'm going to watch you and see how you struggle.'*
>
> *(Julie, I.3)*

Richard highlighted a similar experience which he described as an *'unseen lesson observation'* with his mentor which involved him completing a pro-forma lesson plan and 'presenting' that lesson, by talking through his rationale. He described how each slide in the PowerPoint was linked to how he was evidencing the standards. Although there are some limitations to this 'hybrid' form of observation, notably its inability to capture the

complexities of classroom dynamics in real time, Richard described the impact of the process:

> *'I delivered the presentation and then she had a series of questions … it was more of a dialogue in the presentation to be honest with you. I would present one slide and then perhaps she might talk to me a little bit about that slide in particular. She obviously had a lesson plan in front of her as well, so we had a good sense of what that lesson was going to look like. I think that it was really good because once you've taught a lot of lessons, I think it's quite easy for you to just sort of conceptualise in your head what the lesson is going to go like. It doesn't account for behaviour management and things like that, and this takes out the chaos variables and it leaves you with the things you do have control over.'*

> *(Richard, I.3)*

4.1.7 Discussion of Finding 1 - The significant impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on NQTs' experiences of induction, including mentoring.

WG's change in policy, regarding induction requirements, was intended to ensure that the 2020/2021 cohort of NQTs was not disadvantaged as a result of the pandemic preventing them from completing the required number of sessions within the induction year (WG 2020c). However, albeit well-intentioned, the significant reduction in the statutory minimum requirement from 380 sessions to 110, to minimise detriment, may have had unintended consequences, in some instances exacerbating the inequities that it sought to address. Inadvertently, it seems to have created a 'loophole' where NQTs could complete induction early if the professional standards had been adequately evidenced. Only one NQT in this study managed to complete induction early, securing a post as a fully qualified teacher at Easter. However, whilst this might have initially been deemed beneficial in accelerating her progress, it ultimately resulted in an increased teaching timetable and the removal of continued formal mentoring support, widely considered as vital to novice teachers' professional development (Barrera et al. 2010; Langdon et al. 2014; Shanks et al. 2014; Attard Tonna 2019).

Importantly, for this cohort of NQTs, the changes in policy in response to the pandemic also markedly impacted on the range and duration of their experiences during ITE; the minimum

requirement to achieve QTS was reduced from 120 to 90 sessions, and the stipulation of experience across two settings was suspended (WG 2021). Acknowledging that experience is a crucial aspect of teacher training (Anderson and Stillman 2013), and that this cohort was denied essential experiences that would have supported their confidence and competency (Morgan et al. 2022), it is unsurprising that many NQTs in this study felt ill-prepared by their ITE experiences, even '*half-trained*' (Jane, I.4), at the start of induction. In addition, given transition from ITE to induction was regarded as "too abrupt" prior to the pandemic (Waters 2020, p. 34), significant gaps, brought about as a consequence of the pandemic lockdown, may have heightened the well-documented reality shock that NQTs frequently encounter (la Velle et al. 2020; Morgan et al. 2022), precipitating a '*baptism of fire*' for some (Gabby, I.3).

Morgan et al. (2022) claim that some school-based educators were apprehensive, regarding the diminished previous and ongoing experiences of this cohort, and this was experienced in diverse ways by NQTs in this study. In accordance with la Velle et al.'s (2020) claim that this cohort of NQTs might require extra support, some school contexts offered reassurance that they were there to '*help, not judge*' (Lucy, I.4), suggesting that the first term of induction would be treated as a second placement. Whilst some participants valued their school's acknowledgment of their diminished experiences, recognising themselves as '*that cohort*' (Julie, June 2021), others felt that they were being judged as somewhat lacking. Regardless, both perspectives suggest "deficit thinking", where NQTs are yet to be deemed fully competent (Keltchermans 2019, p. 86). This may be problematic in its focus on what is lacking rather than the potential strengths of these NQTs and what they may have to offer, significantly the potential to share expertise in digital skills developed as schools shifted to remote learning (Darling Hammond and Hyler 2020). Arguably, this places them as "passive and dependent on the judgements of others" (Keltchermans 2019, p. 86), and contradicts the aspirations of Waters et al.'s (2020, pp. 4-6) recommendations to embrace "new energy and fresh thinking" that NQTs have to offer as a means of developing the "self-sufficient, self-organising, contributing professionals".

The need for additional support for NQTs completing ITE and induction during the pandemic, has been increasingly recognised (la Velle et al. 2020; Morgan et al. 2022). However, the findings here suggest that mentoring, became less rather than more of a

priority as a direct consequence of the pandemic and that where this did occur it was instrumental and managerial in nature. Hypothetically, the shift to remote mentoring holds possible affordances in allowing greater flexibility for both the mentor and mentee (Owen 2015), potentially minimising space and time constraints (Kahraman and Kuzu 2016; Spanorriga et al. 2018). However, despite the potential to improve the frequency and duration of communication between a mentor and mentee, NQTs in this study experienced the opposite, with mentoring meetings becoming less frequent and shorter in duration as the year progressed. This might be partly attributable to the growing confidence and competence (real or perceived) of NQTs across the year, implying a diminishing need for support. Moreover, it may indicate that the mentoring of NQTs is positioned as more about getting the job done in terms of evidencing the standards, than a more enduring form of mentoring to support professional formation. However, the findings here concur with Ersin and Attay (2021), who suggest that mentors were likely simultaneously experiencing their own pressures in responding to the pandemic resulting in mentoring activities no longer being a priority.

As a result of the pandemic, this cohort of NQTs, was facing greater and more complex challenges (la Velle et al. 2020; Moorhouse 2021). Effective support of teachers in such turbulent times is arguably even more crucial (Darling-Hammond and Hyler 2020). Given in Wales the systems of support aimed at consolidating NQTs' experiences of ITE had been deemed to leave them "ill-prepared" prior to the pandemic (Waters 2020, p. 5), the documented diminished experiences of NQTs during ITE, (Morgan et al. 2022) as a result of the pandemic, will have likely exacerbated the concerns identified by Waters (2020) and consequently may have weakened the foundations that induction experiences are intended to build upon.

Concurring with Morgan et al.'s (2022) findings, NQTs in this study described diverse experiences resulting from the ways in which their school contexts responded to the pandemic. Significantly, this manifested in the opportunities that NQTs were afforded to be observed and receive targeted feedback, a fundamental means of initiating deep conversations that enable teachers to reflect and improve on their practice (Stanulis 2006; Timperley 2015; Windsor et al. 2022). Schools' compliance with social distancing measures

varied, but all NQTs faced compromised experiences of observation and feedback, with some not receiving a formal observation for their entire induction year. Such impoverished experiences undoubtably denied NQTs access to bespoke professional learning tailored to personal needs (Gordon 2020). It further suggests that processes of "coaching/mentoring, classroom observation and peer review", previously described as "not yet well established" in Wales (OECD 2018, p. 32), may have impacted negatively on NQTs' development of skills and sense of agency and consequently their resilience in and continued commitment to the profession (Day and Gu 2010; 2013).

A further impact of the variation in schools' responses to social distancing measures was the inequities it presented for some NQTs in both gaining experiences and physically evidencing the PLP. In seeking ways to overcome these additional challenges, NQTs felt obliged to engineer experiences and submit tokenistic, rather than more meaningful evidence. Diminishing the authenticity of engagement with the PLP may have heightened the risk of it being used as a simplistic "checklist" (Egan et al. 2018, p. 14) rather than a purposeful framework for professional learning; it also presents a further missed opportunity for reflective dialogues on aspects of teaching practice pertinent to each NQTs' personal and professional development needs.

In summary, the Covid-19 pandemic and schools' responses to it significantly impacted upon NQTs in this study in diverse ways and this particular cohort experienced lengthy gaps in their teaching experiences both during ITE and induction. In this context, it is reasonable to suggest that providing support with professional learning, including mentoring support, would be even more vital for NQTs, particularly at such a formative time in their teaching careers. However, these findings suggest that NQTs' experiences of these were severely compromised and the legacy of such impoverished experiences and their impact on NQTs' sense of self-efficacy and continued commitment to the profession are difficult to predict, signalling a pressing need for additional ongoing support (la Velle et al. 2020; Morgan et al. 2022).

4.2 Finding 2: NQTs' understandings of the induction mentor role lacked clarity, with their experiences of being mentored seeming to be highly variable and largely inadequate in terms of their professional formation.

4.2.1 Mentoring provision

Mentoring provision for NQTs varied significantly between contexts with inconsistencies emerging from the outset of induction. At the time of the introductory interviews, in September and October, nine out of the ten participants had been assigned an IM. However, the level of contact with them varied significantly, and some of this diversity was attributed to social distancing regulations. For example, as previously highlighted, John's IM was located on a different campus with covid regulations prohibiting staff from moving between sites; consequently, they did not meet face-to-face throughout the entire induction year. Similarly, at the end of induction, Gabby highlighted that her only contact with her IM had been via email for administrative purposes and explained *'I haven't even officially met her [IM] or been introduced to her this year'* (Gabby, I.4). Jane, working on supply, did not have an IM allocated to her but made initial contact with her EV, both online and via phone call, during November.

In contrast, Julie established contact with her IM prior to starting her role and described how she had supported her in a hasty move for her job, from Cardiff to North Wales:
'We had a really good kind of relationship straight away I think because when they offered me the job it was like OK can you come up straight away, so I only had sort of a week to get myself up from Cardiff, up to North Wales. It was mad but she was very supportive, and it was a very close relationship from the start – always being there, making sure I was OK'

(Julie, I.1)

NQTs' confusion over the identity and roles and responsibilities of the IM, and other supporting members of staff, was apparent in some contexts. WG define the IM's role as follows:

> *'The induction mentor (IM) provides day-to day support to the NQT and works with the EV to ensure the NQTs receive high quality mentoring and supervision and to provide a recommendation to the AB on the outcome of the induction period'.*

The interpretation of this guidance again varied between contexts, and most schools in the study divided the roles and responsibilities between two members of staff: the day-to-day support for NQTs was frequently devolved to another (typically more local) member of staff, with the IM retaining responsibility for the administrative aspect of induction, including support in evidencing the professional standards on the PLP (typically a more senior member of staff). Consequently, some participants referred to the member of staff who supported them in their day-to-day teaching as their IM, although the formal role often resided with a more senior member of staff on the SLT. Rachel explained '*I think the way the school works is that the induction mentor is the head of department*' (Rachel, I.1), although in fact it transpired that in this context the IM was the deputy head teacher and responsibility for day-to-day support lay with the Head of Department (HOD).

Similarly, John described how day-to-day support was devolved in practice to his HOD in science, with the IM, a member of SLT, being exclusively responsible for administration purposes and support with the PLP. He valued his HOD's organisational and pastoral support and described his relationship with her as '*good*' (John, I.3). However, as lead of all three sciences, she was also very busy and with no time or fiscal reward attached to her role, John felt that she and others in the department had '*been left to pick up the pieces*' (John, I.2; I.3) because of the restrictions on communicating face-to-face with the IM. During the second interview, at Christmas, John questioned the credibility of his HOD as a mentor, describing his experiences as '*not proper mentoring*' (John, I.2), and questioning her claim to have had mentor training. Whilst he valued her support with functional issues such as timetabling, departmental processes, and behaviour management, he questioned, '*Whether she's a mentor, I couldn't tell you really.*' (John, I.2).

Esme also described the distribution of mentoring roles explaining how the IM '*helped [her] get very organised with the NQT side of things – so with the training and keeping everything up to date*' with '*standards*' and '*targets*' (Esme, I.2), whilst her HOD supported '*with [her] professional practice and [her] actual teaching because she's given me tips, she's given me advice on what works for her, what I could do*' (Esme, I.2).

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4.2.2 Access to a mentor

Participants valued their mentor being accessible.

> *'And it's the little things – like on the first day our mentor gave us her mobile number and she was like, don't email me, text or ring...ring me in the evening if you have a panic... yeah, I think that's probably the most important stuff.'*
>
> *(Gabby, I.1)*

> *'Her door is aways open so that makes me feel supported because I can always go and have a chat with her.'*
>
> *(Lucy, I.1)*

However, access to mentoring varied both between and within contexts, as well as across the induction period. At the beginning of induction, the frequency of mentor meetings varied, with five participants attending scheduled meetings once a week, and two participants meeting with their mentor once a fortnight. At this point, two participants, including Jane (working on supply), reported not yet having participated in scheduled meetings with their mentor. Further inconsistencies are highlighted in the duration of meetings which varied from 20 minutes to an hour. Significantly, all NQTs reported that the frequency and duration of meetings dwindled over the course of the year. Interestingly, at the end of induction, Richard attributed this to his growing 'independence' and explained:

> *'They've [mentor meetings] sort of dwindled a little bit you know. It's sort of been that this point in the year I sort of know what's expected of me. And those sessions are mainly delivering expectations and those kinds of things...you know as in we set out the work that's to be done and I set about explaining how I'm going to get there...it's pretty much petered out now. It's pretty much non-existent. I haven't had a meeting with her for a month or two.'*
>
> *(Richard, I.4).*

Some NQTs conveyed a sense that mentor meetings were no longer considered a necessity once evidencing the professional standards had been completed. Gabby's original mentor went on maternity leave at Easter and Gabby described how she had met her new mentor *'maybe a handful of times this last term since we came back face-to-face teaching'* (Gabby, I.4). She described their final meeting:

'...my new mentor was like your PebblePad's done, there's nothing left for us to do or talk about. We don't need to have any more meetings.'

<div align="right">

(Gabby, I.4).

</div>

At the end of induction, John also described how mentor meetings had become less of a priority and less valued as the year progressed, whilst also becoming more focussed on accountability measures. He explained how by the end of induction, his meetings with both his mentor and his head of department had '*died a death*' (John, I.4):

'It's meant to be like once a week and we either have it lesson 2 or after school. I think that they are on the timetable for about an hour, but they've gradually just died down to like ten minutes and really short times. So, she's like have you done what needs to be done and it's all about the workbook and it's all just so clearly now that you just need to complete this. Your NQT [status] doesn't even like mean anything anymore. A lot of it seems to be like writing it up so that no-one can say you haven't done it'.

<div align="right">

(John, I.4)

</div>

He also questioned the value placed on mentoring activities in his description of mentor meetings:

'Sometimes that's just a chat in the staffroom or the library. Sometimes it's just been like five minutes. Maybe that's not being taken seriously. I'm not sure.'

<div align="right">

(John, I.2)

</div>

Rachel, having limited access to her IM in her first school context, experienced similar circumstances in her new school. At the end of induction, having completed two terms in this context, she described her new IM experiences stating, *'So I haven't had any real senior mentor as such'* because *'I don't see him'* (Rachel, I.4). She explained why his support was difficult to access:

'If I email him then he will email me back and say I'm busy this week, but I will catch up with you later in the week and I don't hear from him but that's the case for the other NQTs as well.'

<div align="right">

(Rachel,I.4)

</div>

Although the frequency of meetings declined in most contexts, many still felt that they had access to their mentor, albeit on a more ad hoc basis.

> *'I think our formal ones [meetings] are less frequent because I see her around the school a lot anyway...so if I need advice I'll just drop in for a chat or pop her an email and see her after school.'*

> *(Lucy, I.4)*

Access to mentoring support was compromised in some contexts because it was understood that mentors were busy with competing priorities. Eleanor explained how she valued that her mentor was a member of SLT because it was an indication of experience, and her status reinforced her ability to help her to establish purposeful links with school colleagues. However, it also resulted in her reluctance to bother her:

'...because she's deputy head so I sometimes feel like because she's so busy I feel like I don't really want to hassle her in a way.'

> *(Eleanor, I.1)*

Rachel explained how although her mentor was not a member of SLT, his responsibility for mentoring significant numbers of staff might have compromised his accessibility.

> *'I think it's not a great idea to have a member of staff in charge of both NQTs and PGCEs because they're both under so much pressure and they both need to pass the year and trying to get...sometimes you might have ten of each and it's just unmanageable. And I've really noticed this year that you just take the back burner.'*

> *(Rachel, I.4)*

4.2.3 Focus of mentor meetings

Despite limited evidence of formal agendas for mentor meetings, most tended to address current issues pertinent to the NQTs' development needs or impending school priorities, such as preparing for assessments and parents' evenings. However, with only two exceptions (out of nine participants), mentor meetings focussed predominantly on

evidencing the professional standards. In some cases, support was offered in exploring aspects of the NQT's teaching experiences to identify potential evidence for the PLP.

> *'...we would go through my Pebblepad and look at what areas are a little bit lower than others. We then click into that one and look through which standards are in there. So, if it was pedagogy for example, we might look at advancing the learning, then we could talk about, read what the actual description is for that standard and then talk about what I have done that would fit that standard.'*
>
> *(Esme, I.4)*

NQTs also experienced support from their mentors in organising and prioritising tasks in order to evidence the standards. Esme further described how:

> *'My mentor's helped me with keeping on track. I was sort of letting them go. I did that in my PGCE year as well, I sort of let them go and thought I've got ages to do that. I did it all at once.'*
>
> *(Esme, I.4)*

John described how his mentor played a role in *'chasing me up for things'* and *'letting me know where I'm at with everything and just keeping on top with of that'* (John, I.3). Yet he continued to protest that *'meetings are just about write ups and not teaching and learning'* (John, I.4).

Some NQTs claimed that although mentoring activities were predominantly centred around evidencing the standards and the PLP, this was mainly experienced as an administrative endeavour, often in the form of the mentor setting targets within specified timeframes.

> *'...(it) felt like the NQT mentor that I've had is just have you done this, have you done this standard, have you mapped it? It's very clinical. I don't think she's there as a supportive figure. She's there to make sure you pass your NQT. It's very ticking boxes.'*
>
> *(John, I.3)*

At the end of the spring term, Richard described his mentor setting him a target of writing up one Professional Learning Experience (PLE) template per week, which was problematic:

> *'There's a certain amount of understanding, or lack of flexibility on my part, either a lack of understanding on her part or a lack of flexibility on my part sort of that timescale one template per week. What I find is they're very much like buses and they come along three at once. And sort of like I might have gone two weeks without posting one, but I'll have four almost ready to go and write about. She's (IM) very...I see the benefits of that slavishness to the timetable. It's not how...it's not natural to me.'*

> *(Richard, I.3)*

At the end of induction, Richard continued to reflect on how meetings continued to be '*focussed quite strictly on the PLP*' (Richard, I.4), questioning whether these experiences supported him in thinking deeply about his practice:

> *'It's not especially a dialogue which causes you to think deeply. I wouldn't say that the dialogue between my mentor and myself is something that causes me to think more deeply, more than it was a cause to add to my 'to do' list … I think if the sessions were more regular it would probably allow for things to be a little less focussed on the PLP and more about how you're managing your well-being and things like that. You know frank chats about the pressure of it and those kinds of things. I think those things are important and they tended to happen with my department head rather than my [induction] mentor.'*

> *(Richard, I.4)*

Only Eleanor highlighted that her mentor meetings were not focussed on the PLP, claiming that '*we never used to look at the standards … I think it's [evidencing the PLP] something I mainly do on my own*' (Eleanor, I.3). Julie was the only participant who described how her mentor had challenged her in developing her professional teaching practice, by engaging in critical dialogue to question and reflect upon practice and trial new strategies, '*regardless of hitting those standards*' (Julie, I.3). Concerningly, Rachel, having experienced two school contexts, with limited opportunities to meet with both IMs, received no formal mentoring support in evidencing the professional standards.

4.2.4 Mentoring: a valued endeavour in participant schools?

Within this study, NQTs reported some limited evidence of mentoring as a valued endeavour within their school contexts. Esme claimed that being provided with dedicated space and time to meet signalled the school's confirmation of the value it placed on mentoring activities. Furthermore, Richard believed that the IM role was considered to be '*a prestigious position*' and recognised, in terms of the skills and dispositions of his mentor that '*there's clearly a set of attributes which the school sees as essential to being an NQT mentor.*' However, he claimed:

> '*...I would say everybody values it on paper and sort of in a planning sense it's valued. In terms of bridging that theoretical valuing of mentorship to something practical, I think my gut instinct is that mentorship opportunities are one of the first things to fall by the wayside when that pressure starts to turn up.*'
>
> *(John, I.1)*

Gabby also suggested that the extra challenges presented by Covid-19 meant that '*NQTs and mentoring, at the minute, is pretty low down on their [the school's] list of priorities*', and in addition to the school prohibiting NQTs from attending external CPD events, mentors '*won't be getting any training or anything for mentoring either*'

(Gabby, I.1)

4.2.5 Discussion of Finding 2 - NQTs' understandings of the induction mentor role lacked clarity, with their experiences of being mentored seeming to be highly variable and largely inadequate in terms of their professional formation.

Despite WG's (2017a, p. 3) guidance that the IM be responsible for "day-to-day support to the NQT", findings here suggest that this role was frequently devolved to another member of staff, which caused confusion for some NQTs. Significantly, WG (2017a, p. 3) guidance stipulates the IM's responsibility to "ensure the NQTs receive high quality mentoring and supervision and to provide a recommendation to the Awarding Body (AB) on the outcome of the induction period". The IM's assessment role is made explicit here, but the responsibility for mentoring is open to interpretation. Consequently, for most NQTs in this study, the IM was responsible for administration relating to induction, significantly in ensuring progress

was made in evidencing the professional standards for the PLP, whereas more practical mentoring support was usually provided by another member of staff, frequently the HOD. This arrangement may hold some merit if it is acknowledged that mentoring by senior leaders may be less effective due to their multiple competing demands, in addition to the potential of their seniority to intimidate and impede open and honest dialogue (Hobson et al. 2009). Furthermore, in accordance with the findings of this study, mentoring can be more impactful with mentors of the same subject specialism (Hobson et al. 2009; Johnson 2004; Smith and Ingersoll 2004) and devolving responsibilities may potentially alleviate some of the well-documented tensions that arise from enacting the dual roles of assessor and mentor (Hobson and Malderez 2013).

However, findings here indicate that, as a result of these arrangements, the IM was frequently both metaphorically and literally remote from their NQTs despite WG's (2017a, p. 16), albeit nebulous, guidance for the IM to "work closely" with the NQT. Furthermore, the IM's delegation of support to alternative members of staff is problematic in the potential it holds to exacerbate diversity in the quality and consistency of mentoring. Acknowledging that limited understandings of the mentoring role persist (Heikinnen et al. 2018) with definitions remaining "contested" (Kemmis et al. 2014, p. 154), consensus over how the role should be enacted inevitably remains elusive (Sunde and Ulvik 2014), a dilemma that may be exacerbated by multiple and diverse interpretations of the role by staff who are delegated to enact it.

Furthermore, despite WG funding and advice that mentors should engage in induction mentor training programmes and continued professional development to ensure NQTs' entitlement to appropriate support, uptake by IMs in Wales remains varied (Milton at al. 2020). If discrepancies in uptake of training persist for those who adopt the official IM role, it is reasonable to assume that engagement with mentor training might be even more sketchy for those appointed to support NQTs' day-to-day practice. Although findings here indicate that many of those immediately responsible for supporting NQTs did receive mentor training, it was not a given. Furthermore, the findings here do not establish how funding and resources are allocated for such devolved responsibilities.

Mentor availability is a key aspect of effective mentoring (Grudnoff 2005), including facilitating opportunities for formal and informal discussions (Harrison at al. 2006). Findings here suggest that the delegation of mentoring roles improved NQTs' accessibility to immediate support, to some extent, predominantly as a result of closer proximity of the mentor to the mentee. However, the challenges faced by senior leaders in managing multiple and competing roles were frequently echoed in the devolved mentoring scenarios. This was notably evident when those fulfilling the mentor role held significant additional responsibilities, such as being HOD, that created supplementary challenges which resulted in variations in NQTs' experiences of mentor accessibility (Bryer 2020).

NQTs' access to formal mentoring support was varied at the start of induction and the frequency and duration of mentoring meetings dwindled for all participants as the year progressed. Some NQTs attributed this to their growing independence and understanding of the school's day-to-day expectations, and many perceived that mentoring was no longer a requirement once evidencing of the PLP had been completed. This raises important questions surrounding the perceived purposes of mentoring during the induction year.

Firstly, it suggests that despite a growing appreciation in the literature of "educative" approaches to mentoring (Feiman-Nemser 2012, p. 241) in supporting NQTs in learning how to teach (Langdon and Ward 2015), many NQTs in this study experienced mentoring primarily as an acculturalisation process, underpinned by a survivalist discourse which served to sustain established school practices and expectations (Achinstein and Athanases 2006) rather than challenging them. Such narrow and instrumental approaches to mentoring situate the mentees as "receivers" of school policy (Ball et al. 2016, p. 632) and denies them opportunities to become equipped with the strategies to critically engage with their teaching practice in order to transform it rather than perpetuating the status quo (Cochran-Smith and Little 2009; Stanulis and Brondyk, 2013; Langdon and Ward 2015). Undeniably, as novices in new school contexts, NQTs value the socio-emotional and day-to-day support provided by mentors but this alone is insufficient in supporting the professional learning needs of an NQT (Stanulis et al. 2019).

Secondly, induction mentors may hold the potential to help NQTs consolidate the skills and knowledge that they have established during ITE, and further augment their expertise through professional learning (Borman and Dowling 2008; Ingersoll and Strong 2011; Shanks 2017; Sims and Allen 2018; Milton et al. 2020). However, although effective professional learning should be regarded as a long-term process (Keay et al. 2019), findings here suggest that as currently enacted in Wales, mentoring to support professional learning of novice teachers may cease to hold significance beyond the defined time parameters of the induction year and/ or the completion of the PLP. Given the potential for the professional standards to act as a vehicle for professional learning (Mockler 2022), the halt in mentor meetings for most NQTs on completion of the PLP strongly indicates that currently in Wales mentoring to support professional learning for NQTs may be regarded as a means to an end, rather than an ongoing process. Arguably, in the absence of formal evaluation processes on individual mentor performance, much like teachers in the classroom, IMs operating in an assessment driven system may also resort to "teaching to the test" (Titley et al. 2020, p. 306) when supporting NQTs through induction.

Findings here indicate that although there were no formal agendas, mentor meetings routinely provided NQTs with some opportunity to address day-to-day concerns and current or impending school priorities. Significantly, for the majority of NQTs in this study, mentor meetings focussed predominantly on the completion of the PLP. However, findings here suggest that mentor support focussed, often exclusively, on identifying and addressing gaps in evidence and setting targets to keep their NQTs on track in evidencing the standards, with limited evidence of opportunities for developed discussion to support NQTs in thinking deeply and critically about their practice. Significantly, in focussing on the generation of evidence for the PLP as a predominantly administrative endeavour, mentors may be facilitating an impoverished experience regarding the ways in which NQTs engage with the standards, weakening their potential impact as an authentic learning experience and reducing them to a mere "ticking of"' exercise (Talbot 2016, p. 26). Furthermore, it compromises the significance of context specific critical engagement with teaching practice which is pertinent to both the specific development needs of individual teachers and the learning needs of the pupils in their classroom (Opfer and Pedder 2011).

To sum up, despite some variations in NQTs' experiences of mentoring, the focus of support for the majority appeared to be predominantly on managerial/administrative processes, with some evidence of the traditional 'buddy' mentoring approach in supporting NQTs through acculturalisation processes, in addition to day-to-day technical and emotional support. Despite holding value for some, it arguably compromises NQTs' progress towards self-efficacy and independence (Waters 2020). Furthermore, the findings here present limited evidence of more "robust" educative approaches to mentoring (Norman and Feiman Nemser 2005, p. 680); ultimately NQTs in this study have been denied experiencing mentoring as a collaborative professional learning endeavour that is responsive to their unique and emerging needs as novice teachers. Failing to facilitate such bespoke and authentic professional learning opportunities for NQTs may be a missed opportunity to reinvigorate them professionally (Little 2012; Gore and Bowe 2015) and potentially holds lasting implications for their continued commitment and resilience within the teaching profession (Gallant and Riley 2017).

4.3 Finding 3: Mentoring to support NQTs' professional learning was predominantly instrumental rather than educative.

The role of the mentor in supporting novice teachers in learning how to teach has been increasingly acknowledged (Langdon and Ward 2015), as potentially supportive in the development of skills and dispositions to critically engage with their practice as an ongoing process (Stanulis and Bell 2017; Wexler 2019; Stanulis et al. 2019). Such educative approaches to mentoring are arguably more "robust" and offer a bespoke form of professional development that is reactive to the NQT's unique and emerging needs (Feiman-Nemser 2005, p. 680). However, mentoring support experienced by NQTs in this study was predominantly instrumental, being heavily focused on managing NQTs in meeting the requirements of the PLP, with minimal evidence of opportunities to "problematise" practice (Talbot 2016, p. 25) through critical dialogue (Stanulis et al. 2019).

4.3.1 NQTs' Perceptions of the Professional Standards

NQTs' perceptions and opinions regarding the purpose of the professional standards and their relative merits were varied. Many regarded the standards as a good prompt and basic

scaffold for developing teaching practice. Rachel regarded them as *'good in terms of a framework'* (Rachel, I.4) and Richard described them as a *'perfectly valid way of tracking progress and as a sort of bare minimum'* (John, I.2). Lucy valued their guidance for novice teachers at the beginning of induction:

> *'...to start off I found them helpful because it's been good to look at some, like a teacher rule book I suppose, like these are the sorts of things I really need to be doing to start me off.'*

She also regarded them as a useful tool for *'thinking and reflecting upon things'.'*

> *(Lucy, I.4)*

Additionally, she also described how the standards had potentially encouraged innovation in her teaching practice:

> *'[They] made me more aware of the importance of being a more dynamic teacher because you've got things like the DCF and blended learning and stuff like that. It makes me think outside the box more and probably just makes me try new things more because I know those standards are there.'*

> *(Lucy, I.2)*

Several participants identified the value of the standards in supporting the extension and development of practice but suggested their value was more for NQTs who might be prone to *'coasting'* (Richard, I.4) or were *'underperforming'* (John, I.1). Richard described how reflecting upon his experiences of providing feedback to his pupils, as part of the process of evidencing the standards, had supported his *'engagement with things [he] might not have done'* (Richard, I.4). However, he argued:

> *'I know there are teachers who without having the pressure to write something up for their PLP, they will...they won't have for example looked into all the different feedback options that are available when they feedback their assessment results to the class for example.'*

> *(Richard, I.4)*

A further purpose of the standards recognised by all participants was that of accountability, and the need to evidence them in order to pass the NQT year.

> 'They are, and I suppose they have to be, but they do feel quite outcome focussed or there's something quite summative about them because you know you have to prove what you've achieved and how you hit them.'

<div align="right">

(Gabby, I.3)

</div>

4.3.2 Approaches to evidencing the professional standards

Most participants claimed that their approach to evidencing the standards started with a teaching experience, with subsequent reflection on that experience and whether it could 'hit' a standard. Several participants described how they would list their experiences in order to write them up at a later date, with some evidence of mentor support in identifying experiences that could be used to evidence a standard.

> 'It's more like knowing that when we meet, she'll say like oh you know you've already done this standard you just need to gather evidence from it. It's more or less pointing that out – oh you know, you've met this. You could evidence this for it because I know you've already done that.'

<div align="right">

(Lucy, I.2)

</div>

Particularly with the standards that were considered more difficult to evidence such as 'leadership' and 'innovation', all participants equally acknowledged that they had approached some of the standards by identifying what needed to be evidenced and planning experiences to fill the gaps.

> 'I mean the innovation one is always hard because as PGCE and as an NQT you're rarely given the opportunity to be innovative. You're never really being given the chance to lead … I wouldn't say I'd been particularly innovative at all really. I've been using other people's resources and then trying to stumble my way through it.'

<div align="right">

(Gabby, I.4)

</div>

John agreed, suggesting that some of the standards may not be appropriate for the induction year:

'...there are definitely some trickier ones. There are some that ask for a little too much for this year.'

(John, I.4)

In addition to contextual factors, all participants suggested that some standards were harder to evidence than others purely as a result of lack of experience.

'But I've got a map for the standards and every time I try to think of what I can use as evidence against that and the amount of times I've had to think right I'm going to have to make something up there because I haven't had a chance to do it yet. So, an example is supporting formal leadership roles. I haven't really done those you know. I've attended departmental meetings but in terms of liaising with members of SLT or doing anything like that, I just haven't had a chance to yet because of the circumstances but also because NQTs don't really do that so if the window to meet the standard was longer that would be easier, and I think the standards would be met more naturally.'

(Rachel, I.3)

Expanding upon this, she suggested that evidencing the standards could potentially be more authentic and less 'forced' if more time was allowed for experiences to happen naturally over time.

Participants also suggested that some standards may be more difficult to evidence according to school contexts and whether they enabled or limited opportunities for experiences to evidence specific standards. Some claimed their school contexts offered limited opportunities to collaborate with other departments making the descriptors 'exploiting subject disciplines' and 'cross-curricular responsibilities' more challenging to evidence. Julie highlighted how this had impacted upon the authenticity of her engagement with evidencing the standards within her subject specialism, PE:

'...some of the standards like assessment or putting literacy or numeracy or Welsh, it's almost like a tick box exercise to say yeah, I've done that. So sometimes I had to model a lesson around a standard just so I've said I've done that standard.'

(Julie, I.4)

Many participants explained how 'involving partners in learning' became more challenging to evidence because of limited or no experience of parents' evening as a result of Covid-19 restrictions; some addressed this gap by arranging phone calls home which were still '*hard to physically evidence*' (Rachel, I.4) making Rachel question the integrity of some of her evidence:

> '*Sometimes it did feel forced... I was thinking how can I link this PLE to another standard just to hit it which is obviously wrong. And you know I'm doing it for the wrong reasons...I think some of my standards are very weak and I think that the links that I've made to the PLEs were again very weak. And so, it didn't really feel organic or authentic so I think it would be more beneficial to do PLEs and to map them to standards that are actually relevant instead of just doing them because you won't pass your NQT otherwise.*'
>
> (Rachel,I.4)

Concerningly, at the end of the spring term, John described his progress in evidencing the standards and highlighted the need to 'fabricate' some experiences:

> '*I've done a fair bit of the standards. Just figured out what have I already done or what could I reasonably write up, you know, without just blowing hot air... Some of them I feel like I'm making them up. Like I did one on surveys just to say I did a survey and things like that...It was under pupil voice or something like that. Easiest way to tick this off is with a nice little survey on Microsoft forms. Bish! Bash! Bosh!*'
>
> (John, I.3)

His disillusionment with this was evident:

> '*I'm not sure the Big Brother workbook is actually that useful to be honest. I suppose it relies on the senior leadership being honest about teachers as well... It just feels odd and doesn't really...I don't know... is it just being answerable to the teaching standards? They are there for a reason I suppose so I don't know, I'm just disenfranchised with it, that's all.*'
>
> (John, I.3)

In his final interview, John questioned the value of evidencing the standards as an accurate judgement of teaching practice, claiming that the '*evidence doesn't show I'm a good teacher*', a concern shared by most participants.

> '*If you're being observed you can't fake the fact that you have to have everything together. But I don't think the evidence on there was real evidence I don't think. You could put up a PowerPoint and if someone else had created it they wouldn't be any the wiser. So, it's a bit of an odd system really.*'
>
> <div align="right">(John, I.4)</div>

Similarly,

> '*...I think on paper, it could literally look like someone's the best teacher but unless you see someone teach you don't know what they're like as a teacher. And vice versa, they might be rubbish at doing the standards but could be like one of the best teachers. So, I don't think it's really a fair judgement.*'
>
> <div align="right">(Lucy, I.4).</div>

4.3.3 Increased pressure in terms of workload

All participants claimed that evidencing the standards added increased pressure to an already substantial workload, with the writing up of the experiences, rather than gaining experiences themselves, being problematic:

> '*It's the writing up, it's the time to reflect and time it takes to upload evidence is the real time-consuming thing, the real stress … [it's not the experiences] you go through those experiences anyway.*'
>
> <div align="right">(Richard, I.4)</div>

The word 'onerous' was used multiple times to describe the demands of writing up experiences for the PLP. John expressed his resentment at the requirements of evidencing something that he is already doing:

> '*You have to write a significant amount. It's not like a few words, you have to write like three paragraphs and ensure the evidence is very scrupulous as well about*

something you did anyway and it just feels like yeah, I think you know how I feel about it already. It's just frustrating.'

<div align="right">(John, I.3)</div>

Rachel explained her appreciation of some of the benefits of the standards but felt '*bitter about the amount we had to do'* (Rachel, I.3), and Julie concurred suggesting that '*...at times it felt like I was writing an essay for the sake of it.'* (Julie, I.4).

4.3.4 Evidencing the Standards: A tick box exercise

Most participants agreed that evidencing the standards felt more like a tick box exercise than a process of professional learning, although Richard maintained that '*not all tick box exercises are useless'*, explaining that his professional development wasn't '*tied'* to the standards but '*informed'* by them (Richard, I.2). John questioned the relationship between evidencing the standards and developing as a professional:

> *'This year doesn't feel like me meeting them [professional standards], it feels like me saying that I'm meeting them and that you can write it up well enough to say that you have.'*

<div align="right">(John, I.3)</div>

At the end of induction, Gabby summed up her thoughts on the overall process:

> *'To be honest, by the end it just felt like a pointless tick box exercise that we were doing for the sake of it. It's given me absolutely no benefit apart from a headache and an extra thing I needed to get done.'*

<div align="right">(Gabby, I.4)</div>

Some participants expressed resentment over their mentors' expectations of how experience templates should be written up. There was some confusion and inconsistency in expectations of the level of detail required but also some frustration at being directed to write up experiences using the language of the standards. Richard described his thoughts on how this stipulation had potentially limited his engagement with the PLP and the experiences he had evidenced:

'It's sort of homogenising them to the language of the standard. I've been told I need to make them more succinct and things like that. My experience is like, well come on, don't tell me that my vocabulary is too varied in these standards because I've used the language from the standards to comment on my experiences rather than my own words. I find that a little bit cloistering. What I would say to couch that statement is that I don't think it limits the practice at all. I think it limits the reflection on my practice. Potentially I think it limits the sort of way I think about it and the way that it's permitted for me to express that. But yeah, my fear is that well it's the writing of the experience templates is ticking boxes then.'

(Richard, I.3)

4.3.5 Engaging with standards presents limitations

Although Richard asserted that the professional standards are '*too vague to be limiting*' (Richard, I.3), there was a degree of consensus amongst participants that engagement with the standards had the potential to diminish experiences in areas of their teaching practice. Several participants identified the limitations of the standards in failing to encompass the individuality and personality of the teacher and the potential impact of this upon the pupils and their learning.

'It's almost like there's not a lot of personal content to the standards we have to hit. It's almost like not that they're forced within your teaching but they're not making you do it naturally, or make you think you're doing it naturally. It's almost like you have done this, or if you haven't make sure you do it sort of thing. It's quite objective, yeah like not a lot of personality that can be brought into your own approach.'

(Julie, I.3)

Julie also suggested that bureaucracy and engagement with the professional standards might diminish the experience of teaching in the first year, suggesting that the rewards of genuine growth and enjoyment in the profession can only be experienced once induction has been successfully completed:

'As a new teacher I suppose, unfortunately it is important to do all the sort of tick box exercises and standards and then you can sort of really flourish in the actual delivery

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of the lessons and enjoying that part. That's what I'm really looking forward to when

this is all over, I can just enjoy teaching.'

<div align="right">

(Julie, I.3)

</div>

John echoed these thoughts at the end of the spring term, suggesting that the induction

year had prevented him from being the teacher that he aspired to be:

> *'I don't think that my actual development is tied to the standards. My development is*
>
> *what I feel I have to, not what I have to, what I want to do anyway...It does feel like*
>
> *I'm ticking boxes and I wish I could do my NQT year as I want to do it. It just feels*
>
> *again like a year in progression, then you get to be the teacher you want to be, I*
>
> *suppose.'*

<div align="right">

(John, I.3)

</div>

All participants recognised a key limitation that engagement with the professional standards

presented was that time spent evidencing them detracted from time that could be used for

experiences that were more valuable or meaningful to their teaching practice. John

described how having to spend time writing up the standards had limited his experiences of

planning and learning how to teach:

> *'They're all limiting because I could have spent that time creating resources and*
>
> *learning how to teach, whereas I've had to take time writing, knowing that I have to*
>
> *write for a certain deadline. I knew I had to write one a week. It detracts time from*
>
> *learning on the job...I got disenfranchised. It's a shame though. I don't want it to*
>
> *come across as though I don't care about teaching, like I do and I care about the*
>
> *pupils but everything else that gets in the way.'*

<div align="right">

(John, I.4)

</div>

Several participants expressed the idea that mentor meetings could be more valuable if less

time was dedicated to evidencing the PLP:

> *' ...evidencing that [professional standards] takes up so much of your time I don't*
>
> *think it leaves enough time for deeper or more meaningful things to happen or for*
>
> *the mentor or NQT to choose or dictate what happens.'*

<div align="center">

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</div>

A similar sentiment was expressed by Rachel who found that the substance of professional conversations with her mentor altered once the PLP had been fully evidenced, affording more time for valuable discussions about refining her teaching practice:

> *'I think now that the PLP is done we are starting to have more of those informal conversations about what works well and what I can try again and stuff like that... I think for me, I find the discussions of the other things more valuable. Obviously to pass they year, the PLP is valuable. But for me to make sure that I'm doing my best that I can and to be delivering the types of lessons that they deserve, the other stuff is more important, more valuable for me.'*

(Rachel, JI.4)

4.3.6 What's missing?

All participants argued that the professional standards did not cover all aspects of being a great teacher, significantly because they were concepts that were difficult to measure or evidence.

> *'I think the experience of becoming a teacher so far has been so much about things that can't clearly be written down and are quite esoteric and sort of abstract things it would be difficult to sort of summarise into a standard that can easily be met and evidenced.'*

(Richard, I.2)

Rachel agreed suggesting: *'I've had so many, I call them wins, that just would not be recognised by the standards'* (Rachel, I.4). Whilst it was acknowledged that the standards addressed key aspects of pedagogy, most participants identified the impact of developing relationships within the classroom as a fundamental omission in these.

> *'I think the standards are quite pedagogy heavy, which you know I'm not saying that they don't need to be. But again, I'm little miss relationships and rapport and pastoral. I think there could be more onus on that and perhaps how the kids feel in our class and what they like about our lessons. There's no sort of massive opportunities to demonstrate that.'*

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'It doesn't take into account the way you are with the kids or if you have a nice personality that is particularly suited to teaching.'

(John, I.3)

4.3.7 Discussion of Finding 3 - Mentoring to support NQTs' professional learning was instrumental rather than educative

Despite some variation in perceptions of the professional standards, their impact and practicality were questioned by all NQTs in this study. In accordance with Draper (2004), most NQTs appreciated the potential value of the standards as a rudimentary schema or *'rule book'* to follow (Lucy, I.4), and also recognised their potential to scaffold professional learning opportunities and guide NQTs to extend their range of teaching experiences.

Significantly, some NQTs acknowledged the potential function of the professional standards in monitoring teachers who might be underperforming, despite denials of this being applicable to themselves. The concept of using the standards to evaluate practice in real terms, rather than retrospectively, holds appeal in its potential to support NQTs in the reflection of their teaching practice as an ongoing process and concurs with WG guidance (WG 2019b, p. 1) to avoid using the standards "annually and perfunctorily". However, it also runs the risk of the professional standards serving as a "performance yardstick" (Evans 2011, p. 854), which in seeking to standardise performance measures may undermine the nuances of teaching practice as a "complex, context-specific and moral endeavour" (Kennedy 2014, p. 342).

All NQTs in this study recognised the accountability function of the standards, acknowledging the requirement to 'prove' experiences in order to pass the induction year and this may risk a tendency for NQTs to seek mentor support to merely "tease out the essentials of 'evidence' for scrutiny" (Waters 2020, p. 17) rather than utilising them to engage in critical discussions in order to develop teaching practice. Additionally, Waters (2020, p. 17) argues that the potential inevitability of NQTs viewing induction as a "final hurdle" to jump through may be an unavoidable product of their own experiences as pupils

in an accountability driven education system that compels committed teachers to instruct pupils in "how to please the examiner in order to clear the hurdle".

Predominantly, NQTs in this study endeavoured to engage authentically with the professional standards by considering an experience retrospectively in order to map it to a standard and some NQTs experienced support from their mentor in achieving this. Arguably, this concurs with Clarke and Moore's (2013) suggestion that conceptions of the professional standards might involve adopting them as "a framework for codifying not levels of development but degrees of compliance" (Clarke and Moore 2013, p. 490). The data also indicates that mentor support regarding the professional standards was predominantly involved in target setting and identifying teaching experiences which might constitute appropriate evidence for the PLP; adopting this approach to the standards where practice is effectively "atomized", may result in compromising their utility in supporting professional learning (Forde et al. 2015, p. 22).

The data presents limited evidence of mentors and mentees utilising the standards as a platform to stimulate critically reflective discussion surrounding teaching practice. Rather, the standards were used as a regulatory measure which may be problematic in that it further diminishes the potential for them to stimulate "authentic professional learning" (Sachs 2016, p. 417). Moreover, it exemplifies a "demanded" form of professionalism (Mockler 2022, p. 5), focussed on behaviourist elements of teaching practice, which may undermine opportunities for collaborative and critical discussions between the mentor and mentee that extend thinking beyond the "what" of their teaching practice to the "how" and "why" (Kennedy 2005; Evans 2011, p. 866). This resonates with Waters' (2020, p. 8) identification of an overemphasis on NQTs' documentation of practice rather than their professional growth and his subsequent recommendation of a "shift" in the prevailing emphasis on the "process and proof towards the person and the profession".

Although the principal approach NQTs adopted to evidence the standards was to map previous experiences with the standards retrospectively, all NQTs in this study experienced some compulsion to contrive experiences in order to fill identified gaps in their PLPs, arguably "feeding the machine of scrutiny" (Waters 2020, p. 18). This resonates with

Talbot's (2016) notion of the meaningless "evidence for no one" (Talbot 2016, p. 88) that emerges when the processes revolving around the amassing and verification of evidence approximates to "'ticking off' a list" (Talbot 2016, p. 88). Talbot cautions that such approaches may promote the "standardising" of teacher learning and fail to encourage "deep and extended learning" based on teachers' individual learning needs (Talbot 2016, p. 88).

Adopting this approach to evidencing the standards led many NQTs in this study to question their personal integrity, a situation compounded when they felt obliged to submit questionable evidence that they perceived was lacking in rigour, most notably with standards that were more challenging to evidence. This tension resonates with the types of questions that Ball (2003, p. 220) claims prompt teachers' "internalized" reflection as a direct consequence of the "terrors of performativity": "Are we doing this because it is important, because we believe in it, because it is worthwhile? Or is it being done ultimately because it will be measured or compared? It will make us look good!".

Many NQTs in this study highlighted their disillusionment with the required processes of evidencing teaching experiences and questioned the credibility of the standards in validating what a 'good' teacher might look like. Utilising standards based on external constructions of the 'good' teacher have been criticised (Tuytens and Devos 2010), notably in the underlying assumption of an "unproblematic universal" (Salton et al. 2020, p. 51) which serves as a "convenient fiction" that undermines the inherent complexities of teaching (Salton et al. 2020, p. 51). Notwithstanding, NQTs in this study conformed to a system that literally seemed to judge them on paper rather than practice, essentially suggesting that passing induction may be dependent on how well an NQT writes up their experiences rather than the quality of their experiences per se. Consequently, it is hardly surprising that some NQTs in this study experienced managerial mentoring approaches that were preoccupied with policing this process in terms of setting time-dependent targets and adopting prescriptive approaches to writing up experience templates. Importantly, in terms of accountability, these outcomes may be considered performance measures for mentors too and this may disconcertingly perpetuate mentoring support that prioritises the logistics of evidencing standards over the critical engagement with teaching practice (Waters 2020) that the WG

policy arguably aspires to (WG 2022). Significantly, this resonates with questions that Waters (2020, p. 15) raises, surrounding the apparently low failure rate of NQTs in Wales, which query whether this is an outcome of "a well-managed system of support and quality", or the system's compliance in judging NQTs on documentation, often of diverse quality, rather than the calibre of their teaching practice.

This practice has resulted in many NQTs in this study viewing the requirement of evidencing the standards with increasing cynicism and disillusionment. Of concern is that NQTs' early disengagement with the professional standards doesn't bode well for their future engagement with them, as intended, as a means of continuing, career long professional development (WG 2017c). Prior to the pandemic, Waters (2020, p. 19) claimed that there was minimal evidence of NQTs' intentions to continue using the PLP beyond their induction year, largely because they were seen as a "time-consuming", "tick box" exercise, and the experiences of the NQTs in this study seem to concur.

The data indicates that NQTs resented what they perceived to be the excessive task of writing up experiences, an activity they felt had minimal impact on their teaching practice. Further frustrations originated over varied and sometimes conflicting guidance received by NQTs regarding the number of pieces of evidence per standard and the level of detail required. Some mentors further dictated vocabulary choices that mirrored the language of the standards, possibly to ensure that experience templates explicitly and unequivocally evidenced a standard. This resonates with Ball's (2003, p. 218) concept of the "language" of performativity which he argues requires proficiency in "presenting and representing ourselves with this new vocabulary and its prescribed signifiers". Thus, whilst accountability agendas may encourage a "'dot point' approach" to the standards with a subsequent "narrowing of practice"' (Connell 2009, p. 220), '*homogenising*' (Richard, I.3) the ways in which NQTs write up their experiences may also narrow the ways in which they think about and reflect on their practice.

Many NQTs in this study expressed how the prevailing concentration on evidencing standards may have compromised their focus on other, potentially more authentic aspects of their teaching practice. Pre-pandemic, Waters (2020) highlighted the emphasis placed on

NQTs writing about their experiences rather than critically engaging with the experience itself which may have resulted in professional learning being regarded as "a source of more evidence to write rather than a stimulus for deep thinking and extensive reading, challenged beliefs or changed practice" (Waters 2020, p. 18). This, again, concurs with Ball's (2003) assertion that performativity cultures encourage an increased commitment in "accounting for task work" to the detriment of engagement with "core tasks" (Ball 2003, p. 221). According to the data, the predicament was no more optimistic for NQTs during the pandemic. The skewed focus on creating evidence, rather than developing practice, was potentially more pronounced in the context of the pandemic, where restrictions were in place on the number of adults permissible in the classroom; this resulted in fewer opportunities for NQTs to be observed and receive feedback on their classroom practice, arguably a more tangible and authentic means of assessing progress (Darling-Hammond and Snyder 2000; Timperley et al. 2015). All NQTs in this study believed that the professional standards did not encompass all elements that they considered to be essential in being an effective teacher, most notably their unique and developing classroom personas, as well as their interactions and relationships with pupils, widely agreed to impact upon academic outcomes (Wubbels et al. 2016), as well as pupils' motivation (Martin and Dowson 2009) and disposition to learning (Roorda et al. 2011).

To conclude, NQTs in this study reported experiencing mentor support focussed predominantly on evidencing the PLP. This is not inevitably problematic because when combined with critical discussions that are bespoke to the needs of individual NQTs and their unique contexts, the professional standards can act as a powerful and authentic means of professional learning (Mockler 2022). However, NQTs in this study routinely experienced mentoring approaches that were managerial and preoccupied with effective documentation of evidence for the standards. The overemphasis on instrumental rather than educative approaches appeared to limit the capacity for mentoring to adequately support NQTs in thinking deeply and critically about their teaching practice at a pivotal time in their teaching careers.

4.4 Finding 4: NQTs' experiences of induction are situated and heavily impacted by school contexts

There is a wide consensus that school cultures impact heavily on the realisation and enactment of national policy (Langdon et al. 2019), and this has significant implications for the ways in which NQTs experience their induction year. In addition to overt school cultures and practices, micro-politics and prevailing sub-cultures that permeate school systems may not only markedly influence an NQT's sense of accomplishment and competence (Keltchermans 2011; Buchanan et al. 2013), but also the way in which they learn (Lortie, 1975; Wideen et al. 1998, cited in Korthagen 2005).

4.4.1 Liberation versus limitations

NQTs' perceptions of their school's attitude or disposition towards them, as novice teachers, impacted upon their experiences in diverse ways. A number of NQTs reported how their schools encouraged their growth and valued their potential to contribute to the school community. Significantly, Lucy felt that within her school context '*you're allowed to be yourself as well as the teacher and that's what I thrive off*' (Lucy, I.3). She further described her HT's support and enthusiasm when she proposed an initiative creating videos that were targeted at supporting pupils' wellbeing, stating '*he's really been on board and is trying to help me to develop it for the summer term*' (Lucy, I.3). Similarly, from the outset, Julie perceived her school to be supportive of innovation and personal development,

> '*if there's a project or new initiative that you want to start, they're very much like yes, we'll help you start it. They're very much like this is your time, create yourself as who you want to be … they always welcome me to have any ideas that I can help with them, to enhance their curriculum*'
>
> *(Julie, I.1).*

This was in marked contrast to her second school experience where Julie highlighted the school's tendency to adhere to traditional methods of teaching, suggesting that '*they don't like too many things that are different*' and did not want staff to go '*too far off the path of what the kids already know and do.*' She described an occasion where she'd suggested that one of her lower ability classes might enjoy volleyball or an alternative sporting activity but '*they were like oh no, oh no, we don't do that in this school*' (Julie, I.4). Julie further

described the school's quest for consistency in teaching approaches highlighting how this impacted upon her behaviour and sense of identity.

> *'The headteacher does always go on about consistency so he wants a lot of the teachers to teach one way which is often a strict, didactic approach. So, when I came in and I'm a bit more relaxed, a bit more flowy, I got some alarm bells. I think that's why the head of department came into my lesson in the first two weeks, to see what I was doing...I think they wanted, um... it was a really weird exercise. They wanted me to let the boys in my PE class get out of hand so I could purposely shout at them, so they could see how I shout at kids. Yeah, it was bizarre.'*
>
> *(Julie,I.4)*

Although the head of department was satisfied that she '*could bring order to a class if needed',* the experience had a lasting impact, leaving Julie feeling compelled to compromise some aspects of her teaching practice and fabricate more authoritative approaches to align with the school's expectations:

> *'I feel like I have to be a bit more strict especially when other teachers are around so that they can...it almost puts them at ease...When this woman, she's been there for years and years, when she's teaching nearby or on the same field, I'll put on my more stricter role so that, just in case she sees.'*
>
> *(Julie,I.4)*

Julie acknowledged that she was adopting '*an impostor type of stance*' but felt that she needed to comply and '*rather than letting [the pupils] have too much fun and free range, I've got to bring them down a lot more...mainly so I haven't got to keep looking over my shoulder at who's behind me.'* (Julie, I.4).

Several NQTs reported the impact of their school's approach to consistency in adopting centralised schemes of learning.

> *'We all teach the exact same years at the exact same time, and we are expected to be on the exact same lesson, using the exact same PowerPoint. It's good in terms of consistency but there's not really any room for me to slip in anything that I'd like to*

try…because there's such rigid timelines and things, especially with GCSE, that's been a bit restricting in some ways.'

Although Rachel felt that she could approach her HOD about altering SOWs, claiming she would be '*100% support[ive]*', being an NQT, she didn't *'have the nerve really to break the cycle'* (Rachel, I.3), explaining:

> *'I think if I was an established teacher then I think I'd have the confidence to just do it. So, I'm aware that I am still learning, and I shouldn't really go off and do my own thing because I need to learn.'*

Similarly, Gabby described how she sometimes *'struggled with'* adhering to prescribed schemes of learning because she believed that she '*should have the freedom and autonomy to be able to do what is right for [her] class'.* When preparing for interview lessons during the spring term, Gabby realised that having to use '*centralised schemes*' with resources already prepared, might have been detrimental to her progress because she'd had limited experience in '*making lessons from scratch*' (Gabby, I.3).

John expressed his disappointment that his experiences thus far, had not met his aspirations to be original and inspirational in the classroom:

> *'…some of the best teachers I remember, well one of the teachers in English, he was an absolute maverick and he'd just talk to us about things he wanted to and read to us and in hindsight he wouldn't be meeting things like skills based but when I think about like kindling a passion for learning and things like that…That's not necessarily something we're getting at with teaching. But that was my big ideas then, I don't know if anyone will get to hear…If you think of it as a profession, I thought we'd all be individuals teaching individually but it's never the case. Like I go in and I just feel like another cog in the wheel…and it's only my first year of teaching as well and it's already like that. It doesn't bode well, does it?''*

4.4.2 Job Insecurity

All participants were employed on temporary contracts at the start of induction, including fixed one-year contracts, maternity cover and supply work, which impacted significantly on their experiences of induction and the degree to which they felt valued by their school(s). Some NQTs perceived that being placed on temporary contracts might be schools' responses to their diminished experiences during ITE, suggesting they might be labelled *'that [the Covid] cohort'* (Julie, I.4). Rachel, on a maternity cover in her second school, highlighted her concerns over the lack of certainty that a temporary contract presented:

> *'To be completely honest, it's kind of like a worry. It's something that's constantly there at the back of your mind. I'm constantly thinking about my reference in terms of other schools...I'm constantly thinking about the way in which I perform is going to be a contributing factor to me getting another job.'*
>
> *(Rachel, I.3)*

Furthermore, John described how this uncertainty of being on a temporary contract might have compelled him to adapt his behaviour:

> *'I've entertained that and the way it might bias me in a certain way. It might lead to a lack of comfort. I certainly as a person feel the need to impress people, to impress my peers. I feel like I'm constantly interviewing for a job, you know? It begs the question of are they getting the real me?'*
>
> *(John, I.3)*

By the end of the spring term, positively, four participants had secured permanent contracts. Esme described how this had made her feel valued and helped to remove the uncertainty that she felt over her future:

> *'If I didn't have a permanent contract, I know I'd start to get panicked wondering where I'm meant to go next, how I'm meant to start applying and I don't know whether that might distract me a little bit because I would be concerned about where I'm going to end up. But with the fact now that I'm permanent and I will be here next year and the year after, then it just gives me a bit more motivation and confidence to want to get involved in this, I want to make a difference here and just really 'find' myself in the school and what I can add.'*

John described the sense of growing autonomy that being on a permanent contract afforded him:

> *'It makes me more comfortable in it. I don't have to worry...about security. You don't have to worry about that it's just for SLT. You can sort of start to develop your own ideas and your own teaching technique and it's not like heresy.'*

> *(John, I.3)*

In contrast, at the end of the spring term, Gabby reported how being on a temporary contract made her feel as though she wasn't '*really like a 'proper' member of staff'* (Gabby, I.3) and made her suspect she '*was being watched quite closely and being judged*' (Gabby, I.3). Consequently, despite describing herself as normally being '*outspoken*', she made the decision to '*put up and shut up this year*' because she was an NQT on a temporary contract so needed to '*play it safe*' (Gabby, I.3). At the end of the spring term, Gabby described how she had been unsuccessful in re-applying for her job, and how the process had undermined her confidence because she felt that her commendable performance based on feedback she had received, from teachers and parents from the school, during the induction year hadn't been '*taken into account*' (Gabby, I.3). The experience left her feeling hurt and humiliated and questioning the value placed on NQTs in her school context, concluding that '*loyalty*' from a school could not be assumed:

> *'I'm not going to lie. When I found out maybe 2/3 weeks ago, I was devastated. I sobbed solidly for about 24 hours, and I was like I don't think I could step back in. I felt so embarrassed. It was like the whole school was going to know that I was the one that didn't get the job...'*

> *(Gabby, I.3)*

Although some NQTs continued to experience the uncertainty of job security, others were given additional responsibilities which impacted on their confidence levels and sense of worth. Eleanor's contract was to cover a member of staff on sick leave, and she was informed on the first day of term, that she would be taking on her role of Lead for Science, responsible for applying for funding to create a half-term scheme of learning '*dedicated to*

science and the ethical informed citizens of the four purposes' (Eleanor, I.2). Although she initially felt '*sort of pushed in the deep end*', she believed it had given her '*a lot of confidence*' and also gave her an opportunity to evidence some of the professional standards.

> '[I] *wouldn't want to say no … you've got to be ready and willing to try all these new things and to you know show your initiative …I want to make sure that I do all the extra stuff and if things come up and people ask who would want to do this, I would put my hand up because, you know, I want to seem willing and a hard worker because when I go then to an interview then I can put that down on my application form...you want to show the headteacher and the deputy head all that you've done in that year.'*

> *(Eleanor, I.3)*

Similarly, by the end of the induction year, Esme had been successful in her application for a Teaching and Learning Responsibility (TLR), for pupil engagement and enrichment activities, and this had further enhanced her sense of being valued. Her optimism and sense of belonging were reflected in her description of her interview experience:

> *'And having the interview last week, actually talking about and sharing my ideas. It was just great to hear how enthusiastic he [the headteacher] was about them and then giving me some ideas about what we could do as well. It was more of a discussion really about what the vision would be for the school. So, yeah, it really does make you feel like a part of something, and we've all got the same belief… I feel more value now this opportunity has come up.'*

> *(Esme,I.4)*

At Christmas, Lucy also described how she had started to settle in a school with an ethos that she felt concurred with her own ideas about teaching and learning:

> *'It's just nice to be in an environment where you feel well looked after and that you're being invested in rather than, you know you're here to teach, go off and do it. Like there's loads of support and in terms of the learners, it's focussed on their progress rather than their grade which I think is really important, especially now [because of Covid]'*

At the end of the spring term, she went on to explain the impact of the school context on her development; although she wasn't yet the teacher she imagined she'd be:

> *'I think I'm on my way and I think a lot of it is being down to being in the right school for the right person. I feel like I'm in the right school to help me to become the teacher I want to be one day.''*

In contrast, by the end of the first term, John perceived that the established culture and approaches to management within the school were poor and did not align with his own understanding of how a school should be run. This had adversely affected his wellbeing, he claimed, *'I haven't liked it at all'* (John, I.2). He perceived his school to be hierarchical, with a *'closed'* staffing structure, he described as *'corporate … complex and top heavy'* which caused him to *'dread'* some *'judgemental'* members of SLT, an opinion that persisted throughout the year (John, I.2).

At the end of the spring term, Gabby described her school as *'a very high performing, high pressure school … [having] high expectations for staff and students...'there's a '[School X] teacher [and a] non [school X] teacher...you have to behave in a certain way'* (Gabby, I.3). She further highlighted how the school's assessment driven culture conflicted with her own personal ethos:

> *'I feel like we're constantly teaching to an assessment as opposed to teaching for the sake of teaching or teaching to foster a love of reading, or literature or a book or a language...I think a '[school X] teacher' is quite outcome focussed as opposed to maybe process focussed journey to get there.'*

Julie highlighted the impact of the performance driven culture of her second school and noted that they did not have *'a collective community'* and it felt *'competitive'*, with *'no support and encouragement'* from colleagues beyond her department (Julie, I.4). She speculated as to whether this was a legacy from being a private institution where *'they're*

*very much used to you know being driven for grades and stuff rather than being everybody's buddies maybe.' (*Julie, I.4). Furthermore, she described a lack of '*warmth'* from SLT claiming: *'they keep themselves to themselves unless they have a problem and then they will come to you. Yeah, it's quite hostile.'* (Julie, I.4). Jane, working on supply in often unfamiliar contexts, described the significant impact that a school's attitude towards her had on her confidence and sense of worth, explaining '*being asked back'* to a school and being given '*responsibility'* and '*letting me take my own initiative (*Jane, I.4*),* despite not being a permanent member of staff, had developed her confidence. In contrast, she described the limited support offered in one secondary school context which left her to conclude *'it just felt like they needed a body in the room, and I was being thrown to the lions'* (Jane, I.4). The experience had a significant impact on her commitment to the role, ultimately resulting in her applying for supply work in the primary sector as a Teaching Assistant (TA).

4.4.3 Discussion of Finding 4 - NQTs' experiences of induction are situated and heavily impacted by school contexts

NQTs in this study were employed in diverse school contexts, resulting in variability in their experiences in both the quality of induction and the ways in which mentoring was enacted (Bubb and Earley 2007). Undeniably, headteachers can be highly influential on school cultures, playing a vital role in mediating policy, including legislation surrounding mentoring and induction (Ball et al. 2011; Langdon et al. 2019). Burns et al. (2017) assert that school cultures, importantly surrounding professional learning, can impact heavily on the development of novice teachers, particularly when induction and mentoring are an integral aspect of the whole school learning culture rather than enacted in isolation - essentially, "it takes a school to grow a teacher" (Milton et al. 2022, p. 889). Thus, headteachers and the school cultures they engender have the capacity to help or hinder the growth competence and professional formation of novice teachers (Langdon et al. 2019).

Encouragingly, there were a number of examples of the wider school context impacting positively upon the personal and professional development of NQTs in this study. Some NQTs described a sense of belonging in their school communities, feeling valued when their ideas and initiatives were welcomed by colleagues and SLT, and thus enabled to '*thrive'* (Lucy, I.3). This concurs with research that highlights the marked impact of school cultures,

notably the quality of staff relations and support systems, on job satisfaction and teacher self-efficacy (Bandura 2006; Aldridge and Fraser 2016). Importantly, these factors hold significant implications for teacher wellbeing (Skaalvik and Skaalvik 2011), effectiveness in the classroom (Kunter et al. 2013), and continued commitment to the profession (Akiri and Dori, 2022; Carmel and Badash, 2018), all current and immediate concerns for education systems worldwide.

However, more negative depictions of school cultures dominated the narratives of many NQTs in this study, notably those employed in apparently high performing school contexts which adopted regimented approaches to the delivery of the curriculum. Many NQTs were required to follow prescribed schemes of learning which they felt left them limited scope to innovate and tailor the curriculum to the specific needs of the pupils in their classes. Importantly, the data indicates that as a result of their perceived low status, some NQTs were disinclined to question or amend prescribed lesson content, concurring with Hobson's (2009) claim that being at the "bottom of the pecking order", potentially rendered them "voiceless" (Hobson 2009, p. 312).

A worrying outcome of this predicament was the disappointment experienced, notably by John, in being impeded in becoming the '*original*' and '*inspirational*' teacher that he had aspired to be, leaving him feeling '*like another cog in the wheel*' (John, I.3). Although John is only one participant in a small sample of nine NQTs, if this were to be representative of the general population, it is a significant cause for concern. The data concurs with Waters' (2020, p. 6) assertion that school systems in Wales might be missing opportunities to profit from the potential "new energy and fresh thinking" that NQTs might bring to the profession, instead expecting them to conform to existing ways of working and effectively maintain the status quo. Furthermore, it falls short of realising a teaching profession with "high morale and professional satisfaction" (Beaufort Research and NFER 2019, p. 1) whereby teachers are enabled to develop, innovate and lead others, fundamental objectives of the National Mission (WG 2017b).

There were also some troubling examples of schools with perceived high expectations regarding codes of behaviour for both pupils and staff, resulting in NQTs feeling obliged to

adapt their behaviour in order to fit in. The need to comply impacted upon some NQTs' sense of professional identity, resulting in them questioning their integrity and there was some indication that they felt as though they were adopting an '*impostor*' stance (Julie, I.4). Such internalised tensions may represent a type of "values schizophrenia" (Ball 2003, p. 221) where teachers may feel compelled to compromise their own beliefs and judgement about effective teaching and the needs of their pupils, in order to effectively represent the school 'brand'.

Notably, all NQTs in this study were initially employed on temporary contracts and this concurs with national trends, the appointment of NQTs on permanent contracts being uncommon in Wales (Waters 2020). From a purely managerial perspective this may appear reasonable, allowing school leaders to "hedge[ing] their bets" and be responsive to fluctuating budgets (Waters 2020, p. 9). However, such approaches had significant implications for the experiences of NQTs during induction, not least because of the lack of commitment it seemed to imply. The sense of being under scrutiny and needing to perform created additional challenges for NQTs in an already demanding year (Trevethan 2018). Whilst temporary appointments may be perceived by NQTs as a lack of faith by school leaders, the issue may have been more pronounced for this '*covid cohort*' (Julie, I.4) who were acutely aware of the deficit in their teaching experiences during their ITE and the implications of how school leaders might perceive this. The decision to '*put up and shut up*' (Gabby, I.3) may simultaneously have served to be a survival mechanism and/or attempt to create a good impression. Notwithstanding, it was problematic for some NQTs who were left questioning the authenticity of the fabricated pseudo-identity they felt compelled to present in order to "prove themselves" (Waters 2020, p. 9). Furthermore, it resonates with Trevethan's (2018, p. 59) claims that job insecurity may result in the reluctance of NQTs to trial new strategies and "take risks". Consequently, beyond stifling their professional development, this situation also fails to create the conditions necessary to empower NQTs to think resourcefully and recognise "possibilities beyond their current horizon" (Waters 2020, p. 6).

Four out of the sample of nine NQTs had secured permanent contracts by the end of the spring term, frequently following an interview process. The impact of their improved job

security was highlighted in their reports of feeling more confident and invested in making an impact in their school. The data also highlighted some NQTs' sense of liberation in being able to be the teacher they aspired to be once a permanent contract had been secured. However, the prospect of improved job security remained tenuous beyond the induction year for many of the remaining NQTs in the sample. Two NQTs were unsuccessful at interview following reapplication for a permanent post in their school; one remained on a temporary contract, with the other successfully interviewing for a permanent post in another school. Two further NQTs continued in temporary posts within the same school without further interview and one NQT remained working on supply. If it is accepted that teachers on long-term, secure contracts experience greater enthusiasm and less stress about their work (Grudnoff 2012), and potentially learn more than their counterparts on less stable contracts (Pietsch and Williamson 2010), the experiences of NQTs on temporary contracts may be markedly inferior and potentially hinder their progress of moving beyond "survival" to increasing competency (Pietsch and Williamson 2010, p. 331). The experiences described by the only NQT in this study working on supply depict an even bleaker picture of the negative impact of working on a short-term contract; it is perhaps unsurprising that their continued commitment to the profession was already in doubt by the end of their induction.

4.5 Finding 5: Informal mentoring and support opportunities were perceived by NQTs to be valuable in terms of their practice.

In addition to formal mentoring support from IMs, NQTs placed significant value on other, more informal means of support.

> *'there's lots of more experienced colleagues around me who I feel are very approachable and friendly and I've got lots of unofficial mentors as well as my official mentor'*
>
> *(Richard, I.3)*

Participants working in the secondary sector considered their HOD to be a vital means of support.

> *'it's more useful to have a mentor that's from your subject area [in] close proximity… those are the people who organically become mentors to you … I firmly feel that*

that's how mentorship should work, that you choose your own mentor by the people that you gravitate towards and the people you trust'

<div align="right">

(Richard, I.4)

</div>

He further described his HOD as his *'go to'* person, claiming, *'She's absolutely brilliant. I really look up to her … she knows what it is to be an NQT English teacher'* (Richard, I.4).

Gabby also appreciated being mentored by someone with the same subject discipline (English), which she felt was important in building *'confidence and competence*', and claimed she *'definitely felt the impact'* when her mentor went on maternity leave, as the role was subsequently allocated to a Design and Technology (DT) specialist (Gabby, I.4).

Julie also felt that she had benefitted from her IM being the same subject specialism (PE) as herself because more informal, day to day encounters supplemented the more formal scheduled mentor meetings:

> *' she also worked in the PE department we would have like daily little chats and drop ins like about how did your lessons go, I heard it wasn't so good today or like you've got a nice lesson coming up soon. Because she was in the PE department we just always had that like checking in with each other. I know some people haven't got that and their mentor could be in maths or in science and their relationship isn't as close because it's completely different subjects.'*

<div align="right">

(Julie, I.4)

</div>

Lucy's school was the only context that operated a *'buddy system'* where NQTs were partnered with another member of staff, for an additional layer of support (Lucy, I.2). Lucy's 'buddy' was a Religious Education (RE) teacher with four years' teaching experience and they would *'regularly meet and have catch ups'* (Lucy, I.2) which were *'not specifically to talk about school stuff but I do find that we naturally talk about that'.* Lucy found *'her perspective is helpful'* because *'she's been teaching for four years, and she was an NQT in the school'* (Lucy, I.3). She also explained how they *'teach quite a few of the same pupils too'* and it was helpful to share experiences and *'swap strategies'* (Lucy, I.2).

4.5.1 Support from the wider school community

All NQTs experienced and valued more informal means of support from colleagues both within and beyond the school context. Richard described how he valued being '*in the midst of the department*', where he felt informal support was readily available:

> '...you're hanging out of your door at the end of the day, and everyone is just moaning about what a day they've had. I think those are the times when you learn the most almost. Because you learn how your colleagues react to those sorts of pressures and you get a sort of a model for toughness in some ways but also a model for when to be vulnerable in other ways.'
>
> (Richard, I.4)

John also valued the moral support and '*cooperative spirit*' that he experienced through staffroom conversations with colleagues, predominantly because he felt that they were '*not hierarchical or judgemental*' (John, I.1).

> 'It's of great value when, you know, you've had difficult lessons, it's good just to talk to people and yeah, I like being in the staff room because it's not sort of judgemental. It's sharing what other people, especially experienced people, are having the same trouble that I'm having. It makes me feel like it's not just me. I'm not like a useless teacher and it's something that happens to all teachers generally, so I do like having a community of teachers.'
>
> (John, I.1)

4.5.2 Informal support

Several NQTs highlighted specific individuals whose spontaneous and informal support had a considerable impact on their professional development and wellbeing. NQTs' perceptions of their school contexts were diverse, and ultimately resulted in disparate experiences.

At multiple points throughout the year, John highlighted his appreciation of the department laboratory technician who had a degree in Biology; he felt she was both knowledgeable and approachable, and she would frequently '*hover*' outside the classroom, particularly when he was doing practical lessons with the pupils, ready to support him and provide him with tips

(John, I.2). Throughout induction, Esme described her school context as '*supportive*' and repeatedly highlighted how '*lucky*' she felt to be in such an accommodating environment (Esme, I.2; I.3; I.4).

Gabby also described an experienced teacher of English who started in the department at the same time as her, as a significant means of emotional and pedagogical support. She explained how both herself and her fellow English NQT felt '*landed that we started the same time as her*' describing how '*she's been fab. She's there to share resources and to like bounce ideas off'*, as well as buying small gifts for them to say, '*well done for surviving*' (Gabby, I.2). Similarly, at the end of the spring term, Richard described his school as '*very sharing*' and '*empathetic*' towards NQTs describing how '*you get a lot of people who sort of stop by and ask how I am and that kind of things*' (Richard, I.3). He further expressed his admiration of the pupil-centric ethos of the school with holistic, and not just academic, aspirations for its pupils, Similarly, Eleanor working in a primary setting, developed a strong professional working relationship with the Year 2 teacher who she described her as her '*go to*' in terms of day-to-day support (Eleanor, I.1), and by the end of the spring term, cited her as having the biggest impact on her professional development, notably in her support in planning and creating resources for schemes of learning. At the end of the academic year, Eleanor described how she valued this colleague's support because she understood '*how busy [her] mentor was and [she] didn't want to go to her with like a stupid question*' and that the Year 2 teacher was also more easily accessible because '*she's just next door*' (Eleanor, I.4).

4.5.3 Peer support/ Fellow NQTs

Several participants valued the support of fellow NQTs both within and beyond their schools. Esme, despite feeling '*lucky*' at being in such a '*supportive*' school context, ultimately claimed that her fellow NQT in the department was her '*go to*' person in terms of support claiming:

> '*The first person I would go to really is the other NQT just to see if he's feeling the same or if he's got any ideas. And then normally it's like yeah, I was thinking that too and we go to the head of department.*'

> *(Esme, I.3)*

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Richard also valued the support and friendship from a fellow NQT within his school who he shared experiences with, claiming *'he's having a tougher experience than I am so that sort of makes me reflect on any sort of anguish I'm going through. I think I'm probably in a luckier position than him'* (Richard, I.3).

Some NQTs also experienced continued support from their peers from ITE, who were undergoing induction in different contexts. Julie continued communicating with her fellow PGCE students throughout induction, describing how messaging conversations were a mixture of professional learning and a '*general touch base*':

> '*we are often messaging each other about what resources we are using and how we are all doing … it is really helpful because it's quite interesting to see what they're doing and it's nice to see that we're on the same sort of page …. Sometimes it's just like how's your week been but a lot of the time it is you know, what are your thoughts on this activity or have you tried this in school. Or like, how are you teaching rugby online? A lot of it is to share knowledge and practice and how we can sort of embed it into our own schools.'*
>
> *(Julie, I.3)*

Similarly, Rachel cited her peers from the PGCE as being paramount as an informal source of support, particularly because she hadn't attended induction training sessions facilitated by the consortia.

> '*If they've been given a handout or they've learnt anything in a training session, they will send it to me…it very much feels like a team effort, you know, we are going to get through the NQT year together and we pick up people who are lost along the way. And I feel like that is what they are doing with me, they're just keeping me going.'*
>
> *(Rachel, I.2)*

At the end of the spring term, Rachel highlighted the value she placed on the continued support that she received from her ITE peers stating, *'I just don't know where I would actually be without them in the profession to be honest [they are] just like on my level and I can be completely honest with them because we're going through the same thing'* (Rachel, I.3).

4.5.4 Researcher as mentor

Two participants highlighted the unforeseen impact of the researcher in this study as a means of support throughout the induction year. In our final interview, Gabby reflected on how beneficial our meetings over the previous year had been for her:

> *'It's quite nice to talk about things and also, it's quite nice to like be asked these questions and reflect. Otherwise, I wouldn't have thought about these things or looked back over certain things.'*

> *(Gabby, I.4)*

Similarly, Rachel highlighted the significance of our meetings over the course of her induction year, describing the researcher, as a

> *'beacon of hope and support … I'm glad that I took part in this [research project]... but I'd also agreed to do this before I knew I was going to have such a hard time. So having these little chats with you has, every couple of months, has just got me through. It really did.'*

> *(Rachel, I.4)*

4.5.4 Discussion of Finding 5: Informal mentoring and support opportunities were perceived by NQTs to be valuable in terms of their practice.

Wenger's (1998) theory of communities of practice has featured prominently in sociocultural perspectives that seek to understand school systems through the lens of the social relationships of the participants who comprise it. This is pertinent to the additional layers of support received by NQTs from members of the wider school community beyond formal mentoring guidance. This supplementary assistance is referred to here as informal mentoring and support; acknowledging the ill-defined and contested nature of this term, in this context it refers to episodes when a (usually) more experienced colleague and novice teacher "exchange guidance and advice without any prescribed schedule or agenda" (Leslie et al. 2005, p. 693).

Findings here indicate that all NQTs experienced some degree of informal mentoring, and many described the colleagues who provided it as their 'go to' in terms of support rather

than their formal induction mentor. NQTs experienced informal support from a range of sources. Notably, in secondary settings, NQTs valued the HOD for their subject specific mentoring which some research claims has a positive correlation with teacher satisfaction and retention (Smith and Ingersoll, 2004; Youngs 2007, cited in Desimone et al. 2013). Nevertheless, the confinement of mentoring to internal contexts holds limitations; it denies the value of mentoring support from external sources to provide a "safe" or "third space" (McIntyre and Hobson 2016, p. 137). This is crucial in facilitating the adoption of honest, critical and expansive approaches that that may enable NQTs to question established practice within their schools and potentially challenge the status quo (Hobson and McIntyre 2013).

NQTs valued the guidance of departmental colleagues whose proximity afforded flexibility for impromptu support which may be more pertinent to the mentees' needs than more formal mentoring (Fyn 2013), in part because it maximises opportunities for prompt and responsive feedback (Du and Wang 2017). Some NQTs suggested mentors, including departmental colleagues, should be individuals you naturally '*gravitate towards*' (Richard, I.4) and this resonates with extensive literature highlighting that appropriate matching of mentors and mentees is vital for effective mentoring (Delaney 2012; Ingersoll and Strong 2011).

Findings here also suggest that many NQTs valued both the moral support and sense of community that they experienced from colleagues in the wider school, and many attributed this to their perception that these relationships were non-hierarchical and non-judgemental. This concurs with Colognesi et al.'s (2019) claims that novice teachers may perceive mentoring from senior staff to be a means of accountability, resulting in a preference for mentoring with less senior colleagues. For many NQTs in this study, informal mentoring support allowed for more open and honest conversations which suggests a degree of "relational trust", considered vital for effective mentoring (Tee Ng 2012; D'Souza 2014; Vostal et a. 2021, p. 38). This may mitigate the tensions that can exist in more formal mentoring arrangements driven by mentors' conflicting roles of assessor and mentor, where NQTs may present fabrications of themselves to avoid reprisals (Hobson and McIntyre 2013; Hobson 2016).

Pogodzinski (2012) highlights socialisation processes, both institutional and individual, as important elements of NQTs' acculturalisation into new school contexts and findings here indicate that most NQTs experienced support with acclimatising into school communities at both levels. In accordance with Pogodzinski (2012), NQTs in this study conventionally experienced institutional socialisation, including familiarisation with school policies, values and expectations, via formal mentoring scenarios. Conversely, informal mentoring tended to support individual socialisation, where NQTs developed a broader understanding of school cultures and sub-cultures. Significantly, it is not a given that such counter cultures align with institutional aims and objectives, where novice teachers, as "policy actors", are conventionally the compliant "receivers" of policy (Ball et al. 2011, pp. 625-626). Thus, findings indicate the potentially complementary function of both formal and informal mentoring (Desimone et al. 2014), where informal processes may potentially be more appropriate for personal development, and formal mentoring more suited to supporting the professional development needs of NQTs (Desimone et al. 2014).

Importantly, informal mentoring may potentially compensate to some extent for the over-emphasis on bureaucratic process, including evidencing the PLP, experienced by most NQTs in formal mentoring contexts. Arguably, the 'buddy' system experienced by one NQT in this study (Lucy, I.2) may be a viable compromise between the dichotomous perspectives outlined here.

Whilst findings here indicate the benefits of informal mentoring in supporting the socio-emotional needs of NQTs (Desimone et al. 2014), many NQTs reported informal learning experiences through their social interaction with colleagues which Eraut (2010) argues can afford heightened possibilities for teacher agency.

It is important to note that some NQTs highlighted how they valued participating in this study because the interviews provided an opportunity for them to reflect on their experiences at intervals throughout the year. The dilemma of researcher positionality, as outlined in Chapter 3, needs to be acknowledged here. The researcher unintentionally provided mentoring support throughout the interview process by facilitating a safe space for interviewees to describe, process and reflect upon their experiences. This may be

deemed opportunistic by NQTs, providing space, time and a listening ear for them to talk about and reflect upon their experiences. However, it raises questions surrounding the extent to which similar opportunities to engage in reflective discussion with their IM were presented. Furthermore, it may highlight the potential benefits of an external mentor in facilitating a 'safe space' to allow honest and frank conversations about teaching practice (McIntyre and Hobson 2016, p.137).

Chapter 5: Consolidating the Evidence

Reflecting on the key findings that respond to the research questions guiding this study, the following conclusions were drawn.

5.1 RQ1: In what ways has the Covid-19 pandemic impacted upon the experiences of NQTs during induction?

The induction year can be a notoriously challenging career phase for novice teachers (Mansfield et al. 2014; Heikkinen et al. 2018) however, the profound and far-reaching impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, unforeseen at the outset of this study, essentially added further challenge and complexity to the experiences of this cohort of NQTs during their first year of teaching. Concurrently, the education system in Wales was in the midst of a significant and sustained reform agenda as the pandemic struck, resulting in these NQTs experiencing induction in atypical and turbulent times.

Having endured significantly diminished classroom experience during ITE (Morgan et al. 2022), the NQTs in this study felt ill-prepared to start formal employment and were mindful of their school's recognition of their lack of experience. Moreover, the pandemic's impact continued to pervade many aspects of induction, including classroom practice experience and, significantly for this study, the provision of mentoring. It is well documented that NQTs routinely feel vulnerable at the start of induction (Bullough 2005; Shanks 2014) and are often perceived as "bottom of the pecking order" (Hobson 2009, p. 299), but entering the profession from a position of deficit seems to have significantly magnified the sense of insecurity for the NQTs in this study.

WG's (2020c) temporary policy amendments to induction guidance aimed to mitigate for the possibility of a continued deficit of classroom experience for NQTs in this cohort due to periods of lockdown or isolation. Optimistically, the introduction of a marked reduction in the number of teaching sessions that NQTs were expected to complete to fulfil induction requirements may be regarded as a reasonable policy response in enabling a degree of flexibility for NQTs completing induction within one academic year (as with previous

cohorts), despite enforced absence from school because of the pandemic. However, the unanticipated consequences of this policy were far reaching, not least in creating inequities for NQTs with some being supported in completing induction up to a full term earlier than others, resulting in the suspension of mentoring support and the NQTs' entitlement of a 10% reduced timetable. Thus, this policy seemed to unwittingly exacerbate the deficit this cohort of NQTs experienced; in addition to the already significant gaps, throughout induction and ITE, in teaching experience, this policy enabled NQTs to complete induction with even less classroom experience and this often came with the early withdrawal of support. The significant temporary reduction in the number of experiences and assets required as evidence for the PLP also seemed to further magnify this dilemma. Thus, despite honourable intentions, these policy amendments may have augmented the deficit in experiences of these NQTs whilst simultaneously failing to focus sufficiently on the provision of enhanced support for this cohort which they would undoubtedly need (Morgan et al. 2022). Arguably, this may have served to further undermine the credibility of NQTs who already perceived themselves to be the 'Covid cohort', and were aware that some other educational stakeholders, including school leaders identified them as such. The full extent of the legacy of this is both uncomfortable to consider and challenging to predict.

Notably, given in more conventional times mentoring support has long been considered vital to supporting the professional development of NQTs during induction (Marable and Raimondi 2007), it seems reasonable to argue that it would have been essential during a pandemic which magnified the well documented challenges that NQTs faced in their first year of teaching (la Velle et al. 2020). Yet, as a result of the pandemic, mentoring support was significantly compromised in all contexts in this study because mentors themselves were managing competing demands, and increased workload, whilst adapting their own ways of working. The frequency and duration of mentor meetings dwindled throughout the year, becoming almost non-existent on completion of the PLP. Consequently, in this study this cohort of NQTs experienced fewer opportunities to engage in professional dialogue with a mentor in order to develop their teaching practice, at a time when they arguably needed it most. If this were to be indicative of a wider sample, it really would unquestionably be a significant cause for concern and reflection.

Facilitating observations and subsequent feedback, a further vital form of professional learning for NQTs (Dymoke and Harrison 2007; Cohen et al. 2020; Papay et al. 2020) became increasingly challenging for mentors to facilitate, largely due to social distancing regulations. There were variations between contexts in how these regulations were applied which further created inequities in professional learning opportunities for NQTs in this study. As previously highlighted, many NQTs in this study were already questioning their skills and competency as they entered the profession because of their impoverished experiences during ITE. Nonetheless, they experienced further deficits in teaching experience, mentor support and professional learning throughout their induction year; the legacy of this may be far-reaching, not least in NQTs' sense of growth competency (Korthargen and Vasalos 2005; Attard Tonna 2019), well-being (Kutsyuruba et al. 2019) and continued commitment to and retention in the profession (Reitman and Karge 2019).

5.2 RQ2: How do NQTs describe their lived experiences during induction, with a particular focus on being mentored?

School contexts impacted heavily upon the diversity and range of opportunities experienced by NQTs in this study during their induction year, notably their developing sense of professional identity (Schuck et al. 2017). Furthermore, school cultures and policy (both micro and macro) contributed to these NQTs' sense of fulfilment and progress (Keltchermans 2011; Buchanan et al. 2013; Burke et al. 2015) in diverse ways. Some NQTs in this study described the positive impact of their schools, largely attributing this to the degree of autonomy they were afforded and a sense of feeling valued. In contrast, other NQTs in this study reported feeling stifled in their progress because they were obliged to follow prescribed schemes of learning, which they felt limited the opportunity to develop their own pedagogical approaches, something they were reluctant to challenge because of their novice status (Ball et al. 2011).

Importantly, following the national trend in Wales, all NQTs in this study were originally employed on temporary contracts which presented extra challenges for them because they felt habitually under scrutiny and constantly on trial (Trevethan 2018). From a school leader's perspective, the rationale for this may appear circumspect in the short term, essentially allowing them to "hedge their bets" (Waters 2020, p. 9). However, it was

perceived (real or not) by some NQTs as a reluctance of school leaders to fully invest in them and this may have far reaching implications; notably it may compound a reluctance to challenge the status quo as previously highlighted and impede NQTs in developing an inquiry stance and innovating their practice (Trevethan 2018).

Despite all NQTs in this study being allocated an IM at the start of induction, there was considerable variation in the accessibility of their mentors. Whilst many NQTs appreciated the competing demands of their IMs (frequently members of the SLT) this resulted in a reluctance to '*bother*' them (Eleanor, I.4), instead seeking support from more informal sources (e.g., other departmental colleagues). Accessibility was also problematic when IMs held responsibility for the support of multiple NQTs, and in some contexts also held the role of senior mentor for trainee teachers.

For most NQTs in this study the responsibility for their day-to-day support was devolved from the IM to another member of staff, frequently the HOD, whilst the IM retained overall responsibility for support in completion of the PLP. This interpretation of induction guidance, involving a division of responsibilities, might seem reasonable as the approach takes advantage of the proximity of key staff (not the IM) in supporting NQTs with the practical, technical, and discipline aspects of teaching practice, and removes the administrative responsibility of judging progress against the professional standards. However, in this study it reinforced the concept of the professional standards being remote from the unique teaching experiences of NQTs and suggests the professional standards were viewed by the NQTs simply as an accountability measure rather than a springboard for bespoke and authentic professional learning. These arrangements also resulted in confusion for some NQTs regarding the identity of the official IM and those responsible for day-to-day support. NQTs' lack of certainty regarding the roles and responsibilities of those supporting them is of concern because it may also suggest a lack of understanding of their entitlement regarding mentoring support during induction. Thus, devoid of any pre-determined expectations for mentoring support, NQTs would not be in the position to question the adequacy of the support that was offered to them.

Arguably, such devolved support arrangements served to ease the pressure on IMs who were frequently members of SLT with multiple roles and responsibilities. However, the data here suggested it merely shifted the workload to another member of staff, frequently HODs, whose middle leadership responsibilities presented comparable challenges. The transfer of responsibilities may also further suggest a lack of status of the mentoring role and raises important questions regarding how resources, including time and training, are invested and allocated in practice. Whilst funding is available to release the IM to engage in mentoring support activities (WG 2016, updated August 2022), there is limited evidence in this study of how this might be distributed to those tasked with day-to-day support. Furthermore, acknowledging the reported varied uptake of mentor training by formal IMs (Milton et al. 2020), it is reasonable to anticipate a similar or potentially worse pattern of uptake for those in the devolved role and perhaps even more worryingly a lack of access to it. Given the emphasis in this study on staff taking on a devolved role, these colleagues may lack both robust training and the time considered necessary for effectively supporting their NQTs (Hobson et al. 2009). Without further investment and a reconsideration of the purpose and nature of mentoring to support professional learning, the quality and quantity of mentoring which privileges critical thinking about practice is likely to be compromised.

NQTs in this study experienced significant variations in the time allocated to mentor meetings and the degree of formality therein, which might reflect the value that was placed on these endeavours. Furthermore, the frequency and duration of mentor meetings diminished for all participants as the academic year progressed, this being principally attributed by NQTs to a sense of their growing competence, as well as completion of their PLPs. This suggests that the value placed on mentoring may transient and narrowly focused on accountability measures simply in order to pass induction. It also suggests a paucity of educative approaches to mentoring where both mentor and mentee engage in the critical evaluation of teaching practices which is positioned as a career long endeavour, rather than a list of activities to be completed in a predetermined timeframe. Notwithstanding their duration and frequency, the overwhelming focus of mentor meetings in this study was on the completion of the PLP. This was experienced by NQTs as an administrative enterprise where mentors organised them in identifying gaps in experiences and set targets in order to meet them. Worryingly, NQTs themselves identified this as problematic because it restricted

the remaining time available to them to critically engage in discussion about their own specific day-to-day teaching practice/development points and specific issues that they might be facing in the classroom.

A further point of contention expressed by many NQTs was the overly prescriptive approach that some mentors took in instructing the writing up of experience templates, including an expectation to mirror the language of the standards. Many NQTs felt that there was a distorted emphasis on their performance in writing up the experience, rather than critical engagement with the experience itself. Undeniably, this dogged compulsion to direct mentees to adhere to the vocabulary of the standards ensured that explicit, although rudimentary, connections were made between the standard and the experience intended to evidence it. In the absence of formal evaluation processes of individual mentor performance, this raises questions in relation to whether the quality, as well as completion of the PLP, might be regarded as a performance measure for mentors themselves, rendering evidencing the standards a tick box exercise for both mentor and mentee alike.

5.3 RQ3: What are NQTs' perceptions of the formal mentoring activities they experience during their NQT year and how they impacted their professional learning?

NQTs' perceptions of the purpose of the standards and the value they placed upon them were generally consistent. There was some appreciation of their utility as a rudimentary frame of reference with some, albeit limited, suggestion of their value in their use as a tool for reflecting on practice. Significantly, many NQTs cited their benefit in monitoring performance, most notably in their view for other NQTs who might be underperforming. Lucy's reference to the standards as a '*teacher rule book*' (Lucy, I.4) is insightful and seems to infer this perception of them as a generic and prescriptive 'to do' list.

All NQTs in this study identified the accountability function of the standards as their principal purpose and were highly cognisant that completing them was an essential aspect of passing induction. This may explain, in part, why NQTs remained complicit in their going along with their mentor's managerial approaches to supporting them in evidencing the standards, despite their frustrations. If the overriding goal was to complete the PLP to a

satisfactory standard, it is perhaps unsurprising that NQTs would not disregard mentor support that coached them to do it (Waters 2020).

As previously highlighted, there was an unequivocal consensus between NQTs in this study that the process of evidencing the standards was a tick box exercise with a distorted emphasis on the evidence and proof of experience rather than reflecting on the experience itself. Furthermore, the impact of being required to mirror the language of the standards in the writing up of experiences created tensions. The predicament resonates with Ball's (2016) concept of the "vocabularies of practice" or language of "performativity" that dominate neo-liberal discourse (Ball 2016, pp. 1050-1051) and its impact is of concern here. Prescribing the language in which NQTs write up experience templates may not only alter the way in which those ideas are expressed but also how those experiences are thought about and reflected upon, and this resonates with Ball's (2003) suggestion that presentations of the self that are crafted for accountability measures may ultimately threaten the "teachers' soul" (Ball 2003, p. 215).

All NQTs in this study claimed that their approach to evidencing the majority of the standards was to retrospectively write up an experience that was applicable to a specific standard; many received support from their mentor in identifying appropriate experiences that evidenced the standards, and target setting and forward planning for experiences that would serve as admissible evidence for the PLP. Notwithstanding the authenticity of its intent, this "atomised" (Forde et al. 2015, p. 22) approach is highly likely to diminish the scope of the standards to support professional learning. The mentors in this study were reported by nine NQTs as adopting a regulatory role, focussed securely on the 'what', rather than the 'how' and 'why' of teaching, denying new teachers expansive learning opportunities that promote professional growth and innovation. An especially worrying outcome of the challenges outlined here was that most NQTs were compelled to engineer experiences to use as evidence for the PLPs, which left some questioning their professional integrity, and led to them becoming disengaged with what John referred to as the '*Big Brother Workbook*' (John, I.3).

The endeavour of trying to look good on paper, was regarded as an onerous process by most NQTs in this study and was simultaneously perceived to have minimal impact on their teaching practice whilst also detracting them from more meaningful professional learning opportunities and the things that they felt mattered most. It is thus not surprising that many NQTs in this study expressed a building resentment and frustration at the process of documenting evidence which many regarded as pointless and immaterial. Furthermore, it does not bode well for NQTs' continued use of the professional standards as a "focus for career long professional learning" (WG 2017c, p. 4) once evidencing them ceases to be mandatory at the end of the induction.

Arguably, the disconnect with the process was exacerbated because a majority did not regard them as an accurate reflection of their teaching practice, believing that looking good on paper did not necessarily equate to being good in practice. Opportunities to be observed teaching and receive feedback were judged by most NQTs to be a fairer and more accurate indicator of their progress and performance. However, NQTs in this cohort suffered a substantial reduction in the number of times they were observed teaching - some not being observed formally for the entirety of the induction year. Despite this they were still 'signed off', on the basis of having completed the PLP and therefore meeting the induction standards. All NQTs in this study believed that the standards failed to capture what they considered to be essential elements of a being good teacher, including their classroom persona and relationships with pupils. Despite acknowledgement of the abstract nature of these concepts and the inherent challenges in evidencing or measuring them, their exclusion further undermined the credibility and value of these concepts for many NQTs in this study. This arguably exemplifies the "convenient truth" referred to by Salton et al. (2021, p. 51), which suggests in solely capturing easily quantifiable data, the complexity of teaching and arguably what really matters, for example the "ethics of care" (Noddings 2012, p. 271) and relationships (both within and beyond the classroom context) are disregarded.

An unsettling theme to emerge from the data was the perception of some NQTs that induction was something to be endured, the capacity to genuinely thrive professionally and enjoy teaching only materialising once their obligations to pass induction had been fulfilled. This concurs with Waters' (2020, p. 15) suggestion that induction is "something structural to

tolerate", a disappointing outcome of induction which should arguably be the most accelerated career phase for professional learning (Waters 2020). Within an education climate where the attrition rates of novice teachers are notably high (Schaefer 2013; Shaeffer et al. 2014; Harfitt 2015) and continue to rise (Sims and Allen 2018), it raises serious questions surrounding what experiences NQTs are expected to withstand and the extent of mentors' understanding about how best to support them in the process.

5.4 RQ4: What are NQTs' perceptions of informal mentoring experiences during their NQT year and how these impacted their professional learning?

Establishing relationships with colleagues is a significant element of starting employment (Grudnoff 2012) and encouragingly, all NQTs in this study experienced informal mentoring and support from a range of sources in the wider school community. Notably, most NQTs placed more value on informal means of support than more formal mentoring opportunities with their IM. This was largely attributed to the lack of hierarchy and perceived lack of judgement within informal relationships which established the 'relational trust' necessary to facilitate frank and honest conversations about teaching practice (Ng 2012; D'Souza 2014; Vostal et al. 2021, p. 38).

Although it is difficult to quantify the professional learning experienced in more informal contexts, some NQTs in this study highlighted the value they placed on support from mentors teaching the same subject which in turn may also impact positively on teacher satisfaction and continued commitment to the profession (Smith and Ingersoll 2004; Youngs 2007 cited in Desimone et al. 2013). However, despite the benefits cited here of within-department collaboration and support, caution is required to avoid the potential of insularity of perspective and the exclusion of alternate viewpoints and ways of working. The findings here indicate the untapped potential of external sources in providing a "third space" for mentoring dialogue (McIntyre and Hobson 2016, p.1) that enables 'risky talk' about teaching practice (Eraut 2000).

Key take aways:

1.Whilst the Covid-19 pandemic undoubtedly impacted upon all education practitioners, altering their ways of working in previously unimagined ways, challenges were arguably magnified for the 2020/2021 cohort of NQTs. Having already been subjected to significantly diminished opportunities for classroom teaching experience during ITE, this cohort of NQTs continued to undergo a marked reduction in classroom experience during their induction year, as a direct result of the pandemic. WG's (2020c) well-intentioned policy amendments served as a stop-gap measure that merely accommodated the problem (by allowing NQTs to complete induction with even less teaching experience) whilst failing to provide a solution. Moreover, in its enactment it created further inequities in endorsing the early completion of induction for some NQTs with the subsequent accompanied loss of formal mentoring support and the increased workload of a full timetable. Importantly, both policy, and the schools in which it was enacted, neglected to invest in additional mentoring support as a viable antidote to the dilemma. On the contrary, mentoring support became less of a priority at a time when NQTs arguably needed it most, and this raises important questions surrounding the value placed on mentoring by school systems.

Lacking in experience during ITE, many NQTs in this study felt woefully ill-prepared and questioned their competency as they started induction. Worryingly, some NQTs identified themselves as the 'covid cohort' and were acutely aware that they might also be regarded in such deficit terms by the wider education system. Having started their teaching careers feeling as though they were '*on the back foot'* (Gabby, I.3), may have heightened the well-documented reality shock faced by new teachers in transition from ITE to induction (Veenman 1984).

2. Induction policy guidance was interpreted in most contexts leading to the division and redistribution of mentoring roles; generally, with the formal IM retaining sole responsibility for administrative tasks and support with the PLP whilst responsibility for the day-to-day support resided with another member of staff, frequently the HOD. Superficially, these enactments of the role may be a reasonable compromise, holding benefits for both mentor and mentee. However, it positions NQTs' and mentors' engagement with the PLP as

divorced from day-to-day teaching practice which may compromise the capacity of the professional standards to act as an authentic tool for professional learning. Furthermore, it raises questions surrounding stakeholders' understandings of the purpose of the mentoring role, which may hold consequences for the perceived status of the role and how resources are invested in it. Inconsistencies in the provision of mentoring for NQTs have been heightened with the increase in variability that resulted from devolving the role, including mentor experience, training, and adequate time to commit effectively to the role.

Importantly, despite variations in the enactment of the IM role, these NQTs experienced mentoring approaches that were largely instrumental rather than educative, narrowly focussed on supporting NQTs with the completion of administrative tasks rather than engaging in critical discussions about their teaching practice. This is likely in the immediate and longer term to mitigate against these beginning teachers in developing dispositions to adopting an inquiry stance, being able to think critically about practice and developing a personal pedagogical repertoire.

3. NQTs' experiences of instrumental, rather than educative, approaches to mentoring support were best exemplified by mentors' and mentees' engagement with the PLP. Tick-box approaches dominated, highlighting missed opportunities to utilise the standards as a springboard for NQTs to engage in critical discussions about their teaching practice and for mentors to respond in a bespoke manner to their individual development needs. Furthermore, NQTs perceived that evidencing the PLP was both onerous and futile, having minimal impact on their teaching practice. The legacy of this is of concern in the short term as beginning teachers are not developing critical engagement with their practice, and in the longer term as beginning teachers develop into leadership roles there is a danger of instrumental approaches being entrenched in future practice.

Chapter 6: Conclusions

This study set out to explore the lived experiences of a small sample of NQTs teaching in Wales during their induction year, with a particular focus on their experiences of being mentored. As previously indicated, my personal experiences of my induction year were epitomised in the words of Charles Dickens: 'It was the best of times it was the worst of times'; and my experiences of being mentored were vital in supporting me through this challenging phase in my teaching career. My subsequent experiences as a mentor of both trainee teachers and NQTs has fuelled my curiosity about how the highs and lows of induction can be experienced by novice teachers and the potential impact mentoring may have in shaping these experiences.

By design, this study sought to capture the lived experiences of NQTs at a time of significant flux and complexity in the education system in Wales and consider how they experienced induction in the context of a proliferation of fundamental policy initiatives. The aim was to explore how this dynamic policy agenda was experienced by NQTs and consider the opportunities and challenges it presented. What could not have been anticipated at the outset of this study was that a global pandemic was on the near horizon, and that it would have such a pervasive and radical impact on society as a whole, including the education system and schools' ways of working. Although not an initial line of inquiry, the impact of Covid-19 permeated all NQTs' descriptions of their experiences in the introductory interviews at the start of their induction, including their acknowledgement of the legacy of their diminished experiences during ITE, also as a result of Covid-19. It was thus considered essential to acknowledge the 'elephant in the room', not least because this study presented a unique and valuable opportunity to capture how this 'covid cohort' of NQTs experienced induction during a period of significant turmoil.

6.1 Summary of Findings
The Covid-19 pandemic had a profound and far-reaching impact on the experiences of all NQTs in this study. Having had significantly diminished classroom experiences during ITE, as a result of the pandemic, the NQTs in this study felt they were entering the profession from

a position of deficit, feeling ill-prepared to start formal employment as a teacher. Novice teachers often feel vulnerable (Bullough 2005; Shanks 2014), notably because they are frequently employed on temporary contracts (Trevethan 2018) and perceive themselves as "bottom of the pecking order" (Hobson 2009, p. 299). However, the NQTs in this study experienced heightened insecurity because they recognised that some education stakeholders, including school leaders, were aware of the significant gaps in their teaching experience, and were mindful how they might be defined as the '*that [covid] cohort*' (Julie, I.4). Viewing NQTs in such deficit terms is problematic because it identifies them as not fully competent (Keltchermans 2019) which may position them as "passive and dependent on the judgement of others" (Keltchermans 2019, p. 86). This is in direct contrast to Waters' (2020, pp. 4-6) recommendation that schools in Wales should embrace the "new energy and fresh thinking" of NQTs as a means of developing the "self-sufficient, self-organising, contributing professionals" that Wales undeniably needs.

The myriad of potential challenges faced by NQTs in conventional times is well-documented (Mansfield et al. 2014; Heikkinen et al. 2017), and these were magnified and more complex for NQTs in this study as a result of the pandemic (la Velle et al. 2020; Moorhouse 2021), arguably exacerbating the well-documented 'reality shock' that many NQTs experience (Veenman 1984; Heikkinen et al. 2018). Mentoring has long been considered crucial in supporting the professional development of NQTs during induction (Marable and Raimondi 2007) and so it is reasonable to assert that it would be even more vital during a pandemic (Darling-Hammond and Hyler 2020). Despite increasing acknowledgement of the need for extra support for this cohort (la Velle et al. 2020; Morgan et al. 2022), all NQTs in this study reported that mentoring became less of a priority at a time when they arguably needed it more (Darling-Hammond and Hyler 2020). This raises questions surrounding the genuine status afforded to the mentoring role within school contexts. As John anticipated in our first interview, mentoring may be valued '*on paper*' but his '*gut instinct is that mentorship opportunities are one of the first things to fall by the wayside when the pressure starts to turn up.*' (John, I.1). This presents a significant concern within the Welsh education context where systems of support for NQTs had already been deemed inadequate prior to the pandemic (Waters 2020).

Rather than prioritising additional support, considered vital to those NQTs completing induction during the pandemic (la Velle et al. 2020; Morgan et al. 2022), Welsh Government's induction policy amendments in response to the pandemic, focused firmly on significantly reducing requirements to complete induction, notably the mandatory number of teaching sessions. These policy amendments, whilst positively intentioned, unwittingly created further inequities where some NQTs were able to complete induction early, leaving them with an increased workload and the removal of mentoring support.

Regardless of the pandemic, mentoring support for NQTs in this study was largely inadequate. NQTs' experiences of mentoring provision varied, both in terms of the level of contact and how accessible their mentors were. Undeniably, social distancing measures created challenges for meeting face-to-face, worryingly resulting in two NQTs in this study never meeting their IM in person. However, inconsistencies in mentoring provision cannot be wholly attributable to the pandemic.

For the majority of NQTs in this study, mentoring roles and responsibilities were divided: the IM almost exclusively responsible for support with the PLP, whilst the day-to-day mentoring support was devolved to another member of staff, frequently the HOD or colleagues working in close proximity to the NQT. To an extent, this division of roles appears logical because it potentially removes the tensions surrounding the IM's dual role of assessor and supporter and the inherent risk of "judgementoring" (Hobson and Malderez 2013). Moreover, the closer proximity of the mentor in the devolved role potentially allowed for more responsive and bespoke support for NQTs' day-to-day development needs. Sharing mentoring roles and responsibilities may have eased the workload for IMs in this study, the majority of whom were members of the SLT with multiple competing demands. However, the data indicates that it merely shifted the workload to those who had similar competing demands, but without the time and financial resources that are formally assigned to the IM's role. The lack of investment in the day-to-day support of NQTs is of concern: beyond highlighting the lack of status afforded to the mentoring role, it seems likely that it would also exacerbate inconsistencies in the quality of mentoring in Wales, highlighted in the literature (Ginnis et al. 2018; Waters 2020).

For most NQTs in this study, mentoring support was focussed solely on evidencing the PLP. This support was almost entirely organisational and instrumental, involving setting targets and timeframes for completion of evidence templates, with very limited evidence of more "robust" educative approaches (Norman and Feiman-Nemser 2005, p. 680). NQTs in this study recognised that the overemphasis on meeting criteria for writing up experiences had compromised the remaining time available for critical discussion with their mentor about their teaching practice, which highlights the missed opportunity to utilise the professional standards as a framework for bespoke and authentic professional learning (Mockler 2020). Such narrow, instrumental approaches to mentoring support resulted in many NQTs in this study regarding the completion of the PLP as a tick box exercise which was almost unanimously believed to have little or no impact on their practice. It is perhaps not surprising that the NQTs in this study became increasingly frustrated and subsequently disengaged with the PLP which, concurrent with Waters' (2020) findings, doesn't bode well for policy aspiration of their continued use as a "focus for career-long professional learning" (WG 2017, p. 40).

Worryingly, mentoring support declined significantly for all NQTs in this study as the induction year progressed. Meetings became shorter, and more ad hoc and had effectively 'died a death' (John, I.4) for most NQTs by the end of induction. Whilst many NQTs in this study perceived this was partly a result of their growing competence and confidence, the consensus was that mentoring was no longer necessary once the PLP had been completed. This depicts an alarming impression of the perceived purposes and understandings of the mentoring role by both NQTs and their IMs, and the implied redundancy of the mentor role beyond the completion of induction is of concern. The distorted emphasis on managerial mentoring approaches is perhaps to be expected where mentor effectiveness may also be judged by their mentees' successful completion of the PLP. However, the adoption of "atomised", and often prescriptive, approaches to evidencing the professional standards, experienced by most NQTs in this study, reduces the capacity of the standards to support professional learning (Forde et al. 2015 p. 22). Such approaches may potentially limit mentoring conversations to behaviourist approaches focussed on the 'what' of teaching. This may ultimately compromise opportunities for mentors and mentees to engage in deep and critical discussions that interrogate the 'how' and 'why' of teaching practice, the very

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antithesis of policy aspiration in Wales (Furlong 2015. Donaldson 2015; Waters et al. 2018). Whilst the new professional standards may in principle align with the concept of career long professional growth (Waters et al. 2018), considered vital to the realisation of 'Our National Mission' (Waters et al. 2018, p. 32), the OECD's (2014; 2017, p. 7) repeated recommendations to "strengthen" processes of policy implementation remain valid. If policy seeks to promote educative mentoring approaches, then clarity and consensus regarding the intended purposes of mentoring are vital to ensure its effective implementation (Garvey and Aldred 2000).

Importantly, the long-term implications of denying NQTs the opportunities to develop an inquiry stance and think critically about their practice, fostered through mentoring conversations, should not be underestimated. In failing to arm novice teachers with the skills to reimagine, innovate and critically engage with their teaching practice, we determine the professional dispositions of potential future leaders in the education system in Wales; the paucity of high quality, educative mentoring dialogues and the routine adoption of instrumental approaches to mentoring might become entrenched in future practice.

6.2 Limitations

Despite the rich and nuanced data generated by this research there are, inevitably, limitations to this project that are important to acknowledge. Firstly, the study was conducted within a specific period (the academic year 2020-2021) at a time when the substantial and pervasive impact of the Covid-19 pandemic was becoming increasingly apparent. In completing their induction year in such unprecedented and uncertain times, the experiences of this cohort of NQTs may be regarded as atypical, thus claims as to what can be generalised from this study are limited. Furthermore, data generation took place during a specific phase in a significant reform agenda in Wales which was dynamic and changing in response to the pandemic. Although contextually the Covid-19 pandemic and policy landscape provide useful insights in this set of findings, transferability of data may be limited.

By design, this research study involved a small sample of NQTs to allow for rich and detailed data surrounding their experiences of being mentored during induction. However, acknowledging the challenges of establishing a larger sample size, as experienced at the

outset of this study, increasing the sample size might have allowed for more diverse perspectives in terms of teaching phase, location and contract type. In addition, further consideration of the experiences of NQTs working on supply contracts would be an important feature of a wider or further study.

Importantly, this study focused on the lived experiences of NQTs during induction and the data suggests that a further study into the experiences and perspectives of both the induction mentor and those supporting NQTs in the devolved mentoring role would be a pertinent future line of inquiry. Notably, a further investigation into how mentor training is experienced and enacted would be propitious. Furthermore, whilst the findings here suggest that these NQTs also valued more informal sources of mentoring support, such as departmental colleagues and peers, there is limited data on how this was experienced or how it might have impacted upon the professional learning of NQTs.

6.2.1 Positionality

Whilst I have endeavoured to reflect upon and be transparent regarding my positionality throughout the entirety of this study, it is important to acknowledge my potential impact upon the participants and the ways in which they chose to present their experiences. Firstly, whilst my previous experiences as an induction mentor and senior mentor for trainee teachers have afforded me the advantage of an element of insider knowledge, it will also have shaped my expectations and understandings of the field from the outset of this study. Furthermore, despite attempts to position participants as the 'experts' during interviews, my dual role as researcher and teacher educator presents a potential power imbalance which may have also impacted upon the data generated.

Significantly, it is important to acknowledge my shifting positionality as my relationships with these NQTs developed over the course of their induction year. I felt increasingly invested in them over the period of data collection and it was impossible to detach myself completely from the impact of their experiences, notably when the challenges they were facing impacted negatively upon their sense of wellbeing. I have endeavoured to be reflexive in re-visiting the video recordings and transcripts, and critical discussions with my supervisors as counter perspectives have supported me in trying to establish a degree of

'empathic neutrality" (Ormston et al. 2014, p. 8). Nevertheless, my role within the study will have inevitably impacted on the data generated.

6.3 Final Conclusions

In conclusion, the findings from this study highlight the need for extensive investment in developing the role and status of the induction mentor, notably the ways in which they facilitate the professional learning of NQTs. The overemphasis on instrumental rather than educative approaches to mentoring experienced by NQTs in this study is of great concern and may suggest that WG policy aspiration is failing to reach the "operational level of education" (Jones 2011, p. 760). Aspirations for NQTs to focus on engaging with research and teacher inquiry have pervaded education policy in Wales (WG 2015; WG 2017b; WG 2018a; WG 2019a), which also acknowledges that "highest quality support" will be essential in achieving this (WG 2019a, p. 32). However, without greater clarity regarding the intended purposes of mentoring, the generic concept of "highest quality" remains nebulous and open to interpretation. The distorted emphasis on administrative support experienced by NQTs in this study, as well as the devolution of mentoring responsibilities, exemplifies some of the ways in which schools may be adopting "pragmatic alternatives" to policy enactments, potentially sustaining a gap between what "should be" and "what is" (Jones 2011, p. 761). Worryingly, if the experiences of the NQTs in this study were to be replicated more broadly, this could imply that we are potentially failing a to arm a generation of new teachers with the skills to critically evaluate their practice; this may in turn impact on their career trajectory and future disposition to professional learning. On a system level, it may critically undermine the central aims of the education reform agenda.

Optimistically, the recently revised 'National Mission' (WG 2023, p. 11), in its pledge that support for early career teachers will have "a greater focus on developing reflective, enquiring and collaborative education professionals", may indicate a stronger intent for educative approaches to mentoring but nevertheless remains equivocal. If Wales is to realise the aspirations of a "high quality education profession", a key aspect of the ambitious education reform agenda (WG 2017, p. 24), policy needs to be far more explicit about its vision of "high quality" and approaches to mentoring support that are deemed highly effective in achieving that.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Information Sheet and Consent Form

Research project investigating mentoring experiences of Newly Qualified Teachers in Wales

Researcher: Julia Holloway

[School of Social Sciences]

Information for participants

Thank you for considering participating in this study which will take place during the academic year 2020/2021. This information sheet outlines the purpose of the study and provides a description of your involvement and rights as a participant, if you agree to take part.

1.What is the research about?

The aim of this research project is to gain an understanding of the lived experiences of newly qualified teachers (NQTs) in Wales, including mentoring experiences, as they undergo their mandatory induction period. The project does not entail any external funding.

The experiences of NQTs during their first year of teaching can have a significant and sustained impact on their personal and professional development, as well as continued commitment to the teaching profession. Sharing your experiences as part of this study, will hopefully provide a greater insight into many of the opportunities and challenges faced by NQTs during the first year of teaching.

2. Do I have to take part?

It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part. You do not have to take part if you do not want to. If you do decide to take part I will ask you to sign a consent form which you can sign and return in advance of the interview or sign at the meeting.

3. What will my involvement be?

If you agree to take part in this study, an introductory interview will be conducted at the beginning of the autumn term, with 3 further interviews taking place at the end of the autumn, spring and summer terms. Interviews are not expected to exceed 20-30 minutes and will be conducted online.

4. How do I withdraw from the study?

You can withdraw from the study at any point until the publication of the data. without having to give a reason. If any questions during the interview make you feel uncomfortable, you do not have to answer them. Withdrawing from the study will have no effect on you. If you withdraw from the study I will not retain the information you have given thus far, unless you are happy for us to do so.

5. What will my information be used for?

I will use the collected information for submission as part of a dissertation for the Professional Doctorate in Education. Data may also be used for future academic research. The primary audience will be stakeholders involved in professional learning for early career teachers.

6. Will my taking part and my data be kept confidential? Will it be anonymised?

The records from this study will be kept as confidential as possible. Only myself and my supervisors will have access to the files and any video/audio tapes. Your data will be anonymised – your name will not be used in any reports or publications resulting from the study. All digital files, transcripts and summaries will be given codes and stored separately from any names or other direct identification of participants. Any hard copies of research information will be kept in locked files at all times.
Limits to confidentiality: confidentiality will be maintained as far as it is possible, unless you tell us something which implies that you or someone you mention might be in significant danger of harm and unable to act for themselves; in this case, we may have to inform the relevant agencies of this, but we would discuss this with you first.

8. Who has reviewed this study?

This study has undergone ethics review in accordance with the Cardiff University Research Ethics Policy and Procedure.

10. What if I have a question?

If you have any questions regarding this study please contact the researcher, Julia Holloway, at HollowayJM@cardiff.ac.uk or j.holloway@uwtsd.ac.uk

Supervisors:

Dr Alex Morgan: morgana24@cardiff.ac.uk

Dr Mark Connolly: ConnollyM4@cardiff.ac.uk

If you are happy to take part in this study, please sign the consent sheet attached.

Research project investigating mentoring experiences of Newly Qualified Teachers in Wales

Researcher: Julia Holloway

PARTICIPATION IN THIS RESEARCH STUDY IS VOLUNTARY

I have read and understood the study information document, or it has been read to me. I have been able to ask questions about the study and my questions have been answered to my satisfaction.	YES / NO
I consent voluntarily to be a participant in this study and understand that I can refuse to answer questions and that I can withdraw from the study at any time up until 31st July 2021, without having to give a reason.	YES / NO
I agree to participating in the interviews online, using Teams or Zoom.	YES / NO
I agree to the interviews being video-recorded.	YES / NO
I understand that the information I provide will be used for the researcher's thesis and potential future publication and that the information will be anonymised.	YES / NO
I agree that my (anonymised) information can be quoted in research outputs.	YES / NO
I understand that any personal information that can identify me – such as my name, address, will be kept confidential and not shared with anyone other than the researcher and the supervising team.	YES / NO
I understand that any data that may potentially identify my context will be anonymised or removed.	
I give permission for the (anonymised) information I provide to be deposited in a data archive so that it may be used for future research.	YES / NO

Please retain a copy of this consent form.

Participant name:

Signature: _____   Date _____

Interviewer name:

Signature:_____   Date_____

For information please contact:

HollowayJM@cardiff.ac.uk

J.holloway@uwtsd.ac.uk

Appendix 2: Interview Schedule 1

Introductory Interview September/October 2020

1. **Previous mentoring experiences**
- What I want to do to start off with is to try to establish what sort of experiences you've had in the past with being a mentored or being a mentor. Can you talk me through some examples and some experiences that you've had and where?
- Prompts: PGCE mentors – senior/class/university
- Positive and negative experiences
- How often do you meet?
- Can you give examples of the type of support/activities that you experienced?
- What was most beneficial to you as a student teacher?

2. **Perceptions of mentoring**
- What do you think the role of a mentor should be?
- What qualities do you feel you need to be an effective mentor?
- Expectations for mentoring experiences during induction year

3. **Experiences of mentoring so far as an NQT**
- Allocation of mentor – who is it? Role?
- Access to mentor
- Frequency and duration of meetings
- Activities/ structure of meetings
- Relationships
- Examples of type of support and impact
- Emotional support?
- Support with professional development?

4. **Other CPD**
- Consortia? external CPD

5. **School context**
- Does school support professional development? How?
- Does school value mentoring activities? How do you know? Can you give an examples?

6. **An inquiring profession/ continuity between ITE and NQT**

- Did you engage with research during ITE? Did your mentor support you with this? How?

Appendix 3: Interview Schedule 2

December 2020

Notes: The key policy documents of the education reform agenda in Wales emphasise the need for a certain type of teacher to meet the needs of learners in 21st century, with reference to professional learning through research and collaboration in order to develop the 'professional capital' of education system (NM; PTS; ITE reforms; SLOs; NAPL; Successful Futures). This has implications for the type of mentoring that should occur i.e., transformative or transmission.

To what extent are the aims and aspirations of such policies realised in mentoring contexts and how are they perceived and acted upon by NQTs? What are the implications of this for future mentoring practice?

Are NQTs receiving statutory requirements for induction? :

Professional development of NQTs. Mentoring - different approaches to mentoring particular model in Wales (how it aligns with a unique policy framework.) How is the policy direction of the WG manifested in practice and the experiences of NQTs

How are the policy aspirations enacted? (Stephen Ball – different realities – mentors and NQTs as social actors shaping policy delivery)

What types of mentoring are NQTs in Wales experiencing?

Is it educative?

Questions and prompts:

1. Do you have a mentor?/ What kinds of mentoring have you experienced so far?

 - *what I mean by that is someone who supports you in your professional development, someone who helps you to think about your teaching practice in a critical way - inside (internal) or outside (external) of your setting? - does anyone else mentor you formally or informally? peer mentoring?*

Who is the mentor (seniority/experience; within dept/ other dept)?

How often do you meet? Are these meetings scheduled?

Do you have a reduced timetable? In what ways do NQTs benefit from this extra time – what is its intended purpose?

Theme 1: Transformative or transmission

Notes: – opportunities to challenge status quo?:

Strategic silence – have you ever felt inclined to disguise difficulties/challenges for fear of being judged? probationary-related risk-aversion (Dan and Sullivan 2016)

Fabrications/performativity (Ball); organisational versus occupational professionalism; Judgementoring – assessment and accountability – strategic silence; 'embracing contraries' (Yusko and Feiman-Nemser 2008) or 'connecting the conflicting' (McNally et al.2008)

Buddy mentoring – narrow perceptions of mentoring (Hobson et al 2009)

- *Adaptive expertise*
- *Gap between ITE and induction*
- *Embrace complexities*
- *- novice-expert dualism*
- *Mentor as co-learner*

Potential Questions:

- Can you describe a typical mentoring session ?– where do you meet – how often - how long do they last? What kinds of things do you do or discuss in your mentoring sessions? Are there materials that you draw on to help your discussions? Who decides the content/ activities of meetings? Uptake questioning here - On what basis are these activities chosen/enacted (what is the rationale for these activities)?

- Do you think that your mentor supports you in developing your professional practice? Tell me more about that - in what way do they provide support? Uptake questions.

- In your observation lesson(s) did you teach in the way that you normally would?

- Have you been observed teaching by your mentor? How was it? Formally/informally? Can I clarify if this was a formal or informal observation. What did you learn? Was the feedback useful - did it change the way you think and or the way you do things in the classroom? Did it make you want to find out more?

- Do you have any support with thinking about research or classroom inquiry from your mentor? - did it change the way you think and or the way you do things in the classroom? Did it make you want to find out more?

Theme 2: Enquiry based practice

Notes: National Mission (2017) Professional Standards (2017)

- *Not what is done to the mentee but how it is perceived and assimilated*
- *Collaborative*
- *Co-constructed*
- *Use of research evidence*
- *Close to practice research*

ITE programmes built on enquiry-based practice.

Potential Questions:

- Tell me about your mentoring experiences in ITE?
- Did you feel that the conversations with your mentor were supportive?
- What did they help you learn?
- In what ways have your mentoring experiences built upon those during ITE? Are the experiences similar/different?
- In what ways do you perceive this might have impacted upon your professional learning?
- What other opportunities have you had to develop professional learning? (? Within/beyond school)
- In what ways does you mentor (or other colleague) support you in engaging with research, both reading and practice?

Theme 3: Policy – how is it interpreted and enacted in mentoring events?

Notes: Professional Standards – is it a tick box exercise? (Ginnis et al 2015)

Potential Questions:

- Do you and your mentor engage with the Professional Standards? In what way tell me more
- Do you engage with the professional teaching standards? what do you think about these?
- Has engaging with the professional standards impacted upon your thinking or practice? Tell me more? With your mentor?
- Yes - what has helped you engage with these? Is one of the answers mentoring

- No – have you got any comment on why you think you have not really engaged with these?

Theme 4: Mentoring as privatised practice (Macbeath 2012)

Notes: Boundary crossing – collaborating in the wider school versus bounded professional learning; harnessing the capacity of all to engage in a range of formal and informal prof learning (Langdon et al 2019); tapping into expertise of other staff (Daly et al); development of professional capital (OECD 2018; SLOs 2017)

Potential Questions

- Can you describe any experiences of opportunities you may have had to collaborate with colleagues in the wider school or beyond? What was it all about? (beyond mentor relationship – both formal/informal) Are there certain members of staff that you seek advice from for different issues/problems?

Theme 5: School contexts – the culture of the school

Notes: It takes a school to grow a teacher; impact of interactions among stakeholders; Impact of senior leadership team; - hierarchical structure?)

- In what ways does the wider school community contribute and engage in mentoring activities?

Appendix 4: Interview Schedule Round 3

March 2021

Notes: Open question, talk about experiences since Christmas in general – opportunity to pick up on themes

Induction:

Notes: Some variation in understanding of induction arrangements at the start? understanding, should it be longer?, NQT plus one, 2 years in England, concerns about support post-induction, ? security/future – temp/permanent contract

? hoop to jump through (Ginnis 2018)

Continued support from ITE, continued relationships with mentors and uni staff, Camau Nesaf – bridging transition into the profession is 'too abrupt' 'reality shock' (Waters 2018; Haggerty and Postlethwaite, 2012; Hobson et al. 2007)

CPD Opportunities:

Questions:

Can you tell me a bit about your thoughts regarding the induction year e.g. what is its purpose, how it is organised etc? What is your overall impression of the induction year so far? How has your mentor impacted on that experience?

    a. Has it met your expectations so far? In what ways?

    b. Have you engaged in CPD from consortia? e.g Aspire. If yes - In what ways has this impacted your teaching practice and the way that you think about teaching? If no - ?

    c. Can you tell me about some of your experiences as you made the transition from student teacher to NQT? Did you feel adequately supported? Who was the person who most supported you during that time? Can you tell me a bit about how they supported you?

    d. Have you had any continued support from ITE? Can you tell me about that? In what ways has it impacted upon your professional learning and teaching practice?

    e. What are your thoughts about the induction year being one year?

    f. Can you tell me a bit about your thoughts and expectations for the future? By that I mean post induction year? Where do you expect to be employed? Are you on a permanent or temporary contract? In what ways have these thoughts and

expectations impacted upon your teaching practice or the way your think about teaching?

Mentoring experiences:

Notes: There is evidence of varied experiences of mentoring (Hobson et al 2009; OECD 2018).

Formal IM mentor: Responsibilities are often delegated to more junior member of staff with admin responsibilities kept with IM. Limited access to IM, especially if on SLT. Day to day mentoring support comes from head of department.

There is much evidence of informal and formal mentoring for immediate, day to day concerns, including dropping in on an ad hoc basis. There is evidence of mentoring for professional learning - predominantly linked to standards but also whole school initiatives e.g. disciplined inquiry, some of which are compulsory. Sometimes; Mentoring for socio-emotional support; Mentoring for induction; Mentoring for professional learning/ development; Mentoring for abstract experiences; Mentor as 'buddy' (Stanulis and Brondyk 2013)

Mentor – admin, organisation, often more than one role, ?SLT – time/experience, responsibilities dispersed, review evidence templates, question practice to conform or scrutinise? Mentoring is diagnostic – looking to address gaps – is it a deficit model? Some over-explaining, remote, inaccessible; barriers – online/different campus, less handholding, different dynamic to ITE mentor

Formal induction mentor - Can you remind me of the arrangements for meeting with your mentor?

Informal mentoring

Peer support

Questions:

Do you still have access to a mentor? By that I mean someone who supports you in your professional development or someone who helps you to think about your teaching practice?

    a. Can you tell me a little bit about a typical mentoring session with your IM? How often do you meet? How long do sessions last?

b. What kinds of things do you discuss in your meetings with IM? Who decides the agenda and how is it decided? What materials do you draw upon to help your discussions in these sessions?

c. How helpful is your mentor in supporting your professional practice and professional learning? Can you tell me about a time when your have been supported? Can you tell me about a time when you have not felt supported?

d. How would you describe your relationship with your mentor?

e. Within your mentoring arrangements and experiences, what would you say has been the aspect that has most helped you with your professional learning and development?

f. Have you faced any challenges within and around those mentoring arrangements?

Are there other colleagues who have supported you in your induction year – less formally?

a. Can you tell me a bit about some of your experiences of being supported more informally?

b. What is their relationship to you? How was it established?

c. How have these experiences impacted upon your teaching practice or the way you think about teaching?

In what ways have you been supported by your peers?

a. Can you describe some of those experiences?

b. In what ways have they impacted upon your teaching practice?

c. How are these relationships sustained? Are they established/organised by you or arranged by a colleague?

Personal and professional development

Notes: having confidence to deviate comes with time and experience 'Agents of change' (Milton and Daly), experience of teaching in itself has had impact rather than input from mentor, is mentor committed to sessions? Opportunities to collaborate – learning to learn

Questions:

Having more experience under your belt now, have your beliefs or values about what it means to be a teacher changed?

a. In what ways have they changed/ not changed? Can you explain a little why you think that is?

b. Are you becoming/ have you become the teacher that you'd imagined you'd be? Tell me a bit about why/why not.

c. How has your mentor helped in shaping those beliefs or values?

d. What other factors do you think have affected your beliefs or values?

Observation/Feedback

Notes: mixed feelings about observations, need to feel validated, feelings of winging it, need to know if 'normal', needing to prove to mentor that you've hit target (? Seeking approval ? intrinsic/extrinsic motivation), feeling unable to challenge feedback because NQT, made me feel good but didn't change my practice, tick box, mindful of children but want to show off a bit, accelerates learning, less frequent than ITE, Judgementoring
Diminished in value – covid – perceived as something that's got to be done but not much value attached to it by staff. Have expectations of NQTs been lowered because of covid?

Questions:

Can you describe your experiences of being observed this year?

a. How useful are observations to your professional development? (What do you perceive to be the purpose of observations? Have your observations met this purpose? In what ways/describe? Can you tell me a bit about why they didn't achieve its purpose)?

b. How helpful have those observation experiences been in your professional development?

c. How useful was the feedback? In what ways was it useful? In what ways was it not helpful?

d. Can you tell me about the ways in which this experience has shaped your practice or way of thinking?

Professional Standards:

Notes: benchmark, not shaped practice, tension between real teaching experience and becoming better teachers vs PTS, misses out on abstract teaching experiences, for tracking progress, tick box exercise – but not all tick box exercises are useless (Egan et al), supply

teachers – probs with evidence, language/words are confusing, jumping on the bandwagon

- not autonomy, doesn't alter motivation to be a good teacher – that's there anyway,

'proactive and creative professionals', in accordance with the vision set out by Furlong and

Donaldson (Egan et al. 2020).

Questions:

What progress have you made in meeting the professional standards since we last met?

a. Can you talk me through an example of a standard that you've evidenced and how you went about that? (Was it evidenced retrospectively? What impact does this have on engagement?)

b. Can you describe the ways in which your mentor has helped/supported you in achieving that?

c. Is there anything that you feel might have supported you better in reaching this?

d. Has this changed the way you practice or think about your practice?

e. Is development as a teacher tied to the standards – how limiting or enabling is this?

f. Do you think that the standards cover all the important aspects of becoming a great teacher? (Abstract experiences) Are there important things that you do that don't need to be evidenced?

School culture:

Notes: not mixing with peers, NQTs given worst classes, (Smith, Helleve and Ulvik 2013)

centralised SoWs (Friedson – professional work requires decentralised-horizontal structures –

risk of contamination by commercialism),

some results driven, some progress driven,

supply – like babysitting,

emphasis on professional learning but for what purpose? – school purposes or personal

development?(Ball 2003 – who controls what is valued with regards to performance?

Teacher Soul), feelings of lack of support, out of my depth, (Vanderlinde and Kelchtermans

2013). – in schuck 211).

need to conform to school practice – this is the way it is done here (Connolly et al 2018; Achinstein and Athanares 2006)), reductive practice, feedback feels like a telling off,(Ball 2003)

CPD couched in terms of we're not doing it right – deficit model (OECD 2005),

top heavy management, fear dread of SLT, hierarchy – run like a business (Connolly et al.2018)

Questions:

Can you tell me a little bit about your school's approach to the professional development of its staff?

    a. Do you have opportunities to collaborate with others for professional development purposes? How has this impacted on teaching practice? Why/why not?

    b. Is CPD focused on individual targets or wider school targets? In what ways has this been helpful to your professional development?

    c. In what ways does your mentor help or support you in engaging in CPD opportunities? Do they form the basis of mentoring discussions?

    d. Do you feel valued by the school community? Can you tell me a bit about that/give some examples of when you felt valued?

    e. To what extent do you feel able to be creative/innovative in your teaching practice?

    f. Is there an expectation for things to be done in a certain way? How has this impacted upon your professional development? (To what extent do you feel that you need to 'play the game'?)

    g. What role does your mentor play in these experiences?

Research

(WG 2018; BERA 2019)

Notes: limited because of covid, compulsory disciplined inquiry (forced to do it – for what purpose?), lack of access to research because no longer have uni account, would like to carry out research but not possible

Questions:

a. Since we last met, what opportunities have you had to engage with research?

b. What impact has this had on your practice?

c. In what ways has your mentor supported you in engaging with research?

d. How important is it to engage in research?

Closing question:

Is there anything else that you'd like to tell me about your experiences as an NQT?

Appendix 5: Interview Schedule 4

June/July 2021

Thoughts on induction process – building upon responses from round 2

- Thinking about where you were a year ago, at the end of your PGCE year, and where you are now, at the end of induction, what are your thoughts/feelings? In what ways have you changed/stayed the same? Can you describe?

- Reflecting upon your induction year, has it met your expectations in terms of the support you have received to develop confidence and competence in the role? How? Why not? Are there aspects missing? What has been most helpful in your professional development?

- Have you been 'signed off'' Can you tell me about these experiences? Can you tell me what role your mentor played in this process? How helpful has that been to your professional development? What role has the EV played in the process? How have they supported you?

- Do you feel that induction was long enough – do you now feel confident and fully prepared to go forward without the support you had in your induction year? If yes, what do you think has been of help in you reaching this point? If no, why do you feel this way? What could have been put in place that would have helped with this? How has your mentor supported you in reaching this point?

- Have you engaged with further CPD from consortia? Can you tell me about this? How useful has this been? What do you think might benefit next year's cohorts of NQTs given your experiences?

Mentoring – both formal and informal

Do you currently have access to a mentor? By that I mean someone who supports you in your professional development or someone who helps you to think about your teaching practice?

a) Can you tell me a little bit about a typical mentoring session with your IM? How often do you meet? How long do sessions last? Have things changed in the arrangements over the course of the year? If so, how?

b) What kinds of things do you discuss in your meetings with IM? Who decides the agenda and how is it decided? What materials do you draw upon to help your discussions in these sessions? Have the types of things you discuss changed? Can you tell me about this? Has your discussion ever drawn on external materials or ideas e.g. research or professional articles or examples of pupil work or things they have said about their experiences.

c) How helpful do you feel is your mentor in supporting your professional practice and professional learning? Building upon your experiences that we talked about last time; can you tell me about a time when you have felt supported by your mentor to think deeply and develop expertise around practice? Can you tell me about a time when you have not felt supported to do so?

d) How would you describe your relationship with your mentor? Has this relationship changed over the course of the year? In what ways? How has this impacted upon the dialogues you have had and your professional learning and development?

e) Within your mentoring arrangements and experiences, what would you say has been the aspect that has most helped you with your professional learning and development? Is there anything that could be added to enhance the impact of these experiences?

f) Have you faced any challenges within and around those mentoring arrangements?Do you feel you can be completely honest about your practice with your mentor? Do you feel you can trust them to say anything about your practice, even things that have been unsettling and difficult and to discuss this with them even if you have a different opinion on something? (examples). If you can't talk in this way with your mentor who can you talk to ?

Are there other colleagues who have supported you in your induction year – less formally?

a) Building upon some of the experiences you shared last time can you add any further details about ways in which you have been supported in a more informal way?

b) What is their relationship to you? How was it established? Has it changed over the course of the year? IN what ways? What impact has this had on you and your professional development?

c) How have these experiences impacted upon your teaching practice or the way you think about teaching?

Externality - honesty trust (examples) - meaningful conversations - thinking partner

In what ways have you been supported by your peers?

  a) Can you describe some of those experiences?

  b) In what ways have they impacted upon your teaching practice?

  c) How are these relationships sustained? Are they established/organised by you or arranged by a colleague? How have they changed over the course of the year?

  d) When considering all of the sources of support over the year – peers/informal/formal mentoring – has there been a shift in importance of those who impact upon you and your teaching?

Observations:

  - Last time that we met, we talked about some of the challenges of facilitating observations. Have you been observed teaching since we last met? Can you describe your experiences of being observed this year?

  - What did you learn? How useful do you feel these observations were to your professional development? (What do you perceive to be the purpose of observations? Have your observations met this purpose? In what ways/describe? Can you tell me a bit about why they didn't achieve its purpose)?

  - How helpful have those observation experiences been in your professional development? Did you discuss these or what you learnt with your mentor?

  - How useful was the feedback? In what ways was it useful? In what ways was it not helpful?

  - Can you tell me about the ways in which this experience has shaped your practice or way of thinking going forward?

  - What would you like to happen in terms of observations in the future?

Professional Standards:

  - You will have had to provide evidence of meeting the professional standards to pass induction. Have you been able to do this? How easy/difficult has this been? Can you explain/ talk me through some examples? Have you evidenced retrospectively?

- Can you describe your thoughts and feelings about the expectation of evidencing the standards? How helpful do you feel this is process in shaping you and your teaching practice?

- How meaningful have the standards been in shaping your practice or the way that you think about your practice? Are there any standards you feel are difficult to understand inappropriate or unhelpful?

- Have you been supported in discussing and meeting these standards? What was most important/impactful in helping you to meet these standards? What challenges have you faced?

- In what ways has your mentor supported you in discussing and meeting these standards? Describe

- Is there anything that you feel might have supported you better in meeting and evidencing the standards?

- Are some standards more difficult to evidence in the first year of teaching? How could you be supported to meet these more challenging standards?

- How useful do you feel the standards are and how important do you feel it is it to work towards the standards moving forward?

- Is development as a teacher tied to the standards – how limiting or enabling is this?

- Do you think that the standards cover all the important aspects of becoming a great teacher? (Abstract experiences) Are there important things that you do that don't need to be evidenced?

-

Opportunities to Develop/Engage with Research and Evaluate Practice

One of the standards/ SF/NM/NC requires you to engage with wider reading and research.

- Since we last met, what opportunities have you had to engage with research? Give examples professional journal - ideas on twitter - webinar – dylan william

- What impact if any has this had on your practice?

- In what ways has your mentor supported you in engaging with research?

- How important do you feel it is it to engage withresearch?

- What would be helpful in facilitating your engagement with reading research or professional articles

- Have you had any chance to be involved in teacher inquiry? As a student?

Personal and Professional Development:

- Having come to the end of the induction period, with even more experience under your belt, what are your thoughts and feelings about what it means to be a teacher changed? Can you explain a little why you think that is?

- Last time we talked a little about whether you are becoming or have become the teacher that you imagined or aspired to be? Tell me a bit about why/why not.

- How has your mentor helped in shaping those beliefs or values?

- What other factors do you think have affected your beliefs or values?

School Culture - are they shaping this or reshaping themselves to fit:

- We've talked in previous meetings about your school's approach to professional learning and the development of its staff. Can you tell me a little about this? Does it feel saft to contribute what you really think? In what ways is this tricky?

- Do you have opportunities to collaborate with others for professional development purposes? How has this impacted on teaching practice? Why/why not?

- Has CPD focused on individual targets or wider school targets? In what ways has this been helpful to your professional development?

- Is there an aspect of CPD that you think the school could have further supported you with? What would you like the school to provide ideally?

- In what ways does your mentor help or support you in engaging in CPD opportunities? Do they form the basis of mentoring discussions?

- We talked last time about feeling valued by the school community. Do you still feel /not feel valued by the school community? Can you tell me a bit about that/give some examples of when you felt valued/ not valued?

- To what extent do you feel able to be creative/innovative in your teaching practice?

a) Is there an expectation for things to be done in a certain way? How has this impacted upon your professional development? (To what extent do you feel that you need to 'play the game'?)

b) What role does your mentor play in these experiences?

Impact of covid:

- What are some of the challenges that you've faced as a result of covid this year? What about last year? How impacted what did that mean this year? Assessment!!!

- What impact do you feel has the pandemic and covid 19 regulations has on your development as a teacher? – further develop this

- Has it limited or enhanced your development? Can you explain? Examples

- Did your mentor support you in adapting to online learning? How? Examples

- Did anyone else?

Moving forward *(dispositions/continued support/ attrition/ retention)*

- Can you describe your thoughts and feelings about the future/moving forward?

- Ask about employment circumstances/ contracts. If permanent contract – when was it made permanent? Did this impact upon you and your teaching practice in any way? If moved school – what motivated you to do this?

- Where do you see yourself in 5 years' time?

- What aspect of induction do you feel will have the most lasting impact on you, your teaching practice and your sense of identity moving forwards? Can you explain why?

- What are your thoughts and feelings about no longer having a formal mentor to support you with your development? What will you miss?

- How hopeful are you about your future in the teaching profession? What are your goals and aspirations? How would you like to learn about and think about your practice going forward?

Closing question:

- Is there anything else that you'd like to tell me about your experiences as an NQT this year? Any thoughts on mentoring NQTs?

- If you were asked to mentor an NQT in the future - what approach would you take? What is important? What opportunities would you create for them? What would you not do?

Appendix 6: Initial Open Coding and Annotation of Transcripts

...you aspired to be. Or are you getting in that direction. Have your thoughts changed again compared to what you thought at the beginning of the year?

I: I think that they have changed a bit more now. Especially with having this TLR because I was obviously getting all the things together for the interview, researching, putting some ideas down and now it's changed a little bit into realising it's a lot more than just the classroom. It's giving them opportunities that they might not have had at home or outside of school. And helping a lot with their different emotions as well as emotional literacy and this like being kind to each other and how they communicate with each other and things like that. This has helped me to realise that it's not just teaching them English. There's more to shaping them as individuals as well.

Now has greater appreciation of holistic roles of pupil ?and dev'lt of TLR

R: So, has your mentor helped you at all in shaping those beliefs?

I: In a way because it's just the conversations that we've had with certain people, like my mentor is so positive and she does really care about the pupils. So it's just to hear someone else saying that as well. It just makes me feel more confident in what my beliefs are and it'[s nice to know that other people have the same views so yeah, it's just made me more determined to go ahead with what I believe in and do what I can.

some influence from mentor in shaping beliefs

IM confirmed + consolidated beliefs, values

R: How supportive has the wider school been in your development?

I: I think it's really helpful. Yeah sort of the head teacher as well, he's been so willing and enthusiastic for us too. If there's something that we want to do then he will do anything that he can do to let that happen. And having the interview last week, actually talking about and sharing my ideas. It was just great to hear how enthusiastic he was about them and then giving me some ideas about what we could do as well. It was more of a discussion really about

HT – understands/values teachers, embraces new ideas, encourages/supports learning

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— Obs

...servation, that would have been nice. I know some NQTs did have that in different areas but I don't think I've had less of an experience without them.

R: I'm just going to go back to the professional standards. So you've had to provide evidence and that's being moderated at the moment. How easy or difficult has it been for you to evidence the standards?

I: I wouldn't say it's actually been too difficult to actually think of the ideas and meeting them but actual physical evidence where you have to upload the pictures or docume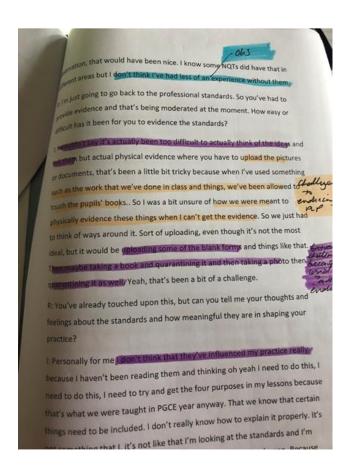nts, that's been a little bit tricky because when I've used something such as the work that we've done in class and things, we've been allowed to touch the pupils' books.. So I was a bit unsure of how we were meant to physically evidence these things when I can't get the evidence. So we just had to think of ways around it. Sort of uploading, even though it's not the most ideal, but it would be uploading some of the blank forms and things like that. Then maybe taking a book and quarantining it and then taking a photo then quarantining it as well. Yeah, that's been a bit of a challenge.

challenge to evidencing RP

covid restrictions becoming tricky aspect of evidence

R: You've already touched upon this, but can you tell me your thoughts and feelings about the standards and how meaningful they are in shaping your practice?

I: Personally for me I don't think that they've influenced my practice really because I haven't been reading them and thinking oh yeah I need to do this, I need to do this, I need to try and get the four purposes in my lessons because that's what we were taught in PGCE year anyway. That we know that certain things need to be included. I don't really know how to explain it properly. It's not something that I, it's not like that I'm looking at the standards and I'm...

Appendix 7: Thematic Organisation of Data

Appendix 8: Participant Summary Form Template

Participant Summary Form Template

Name:	Interview:	Type:
Date:	Duration:	

Theme 1:
Key points:
Theme 2:
Key Points:
Theme 3:
Key Points:
Theme 4:
Key Points

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Further Points of Note:

Appendix 9: Ethics Approval from Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee

School of Social Sciences
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27 July 2020

Our ref: SREC/3851

Julia Holloway
Professional Doctorate Programme
SOCSI

Dear Julia,

Your project entitled *'Experiences of being mentored as an early career teacher in Wales'* has now been approved by the School of Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee of Cardiff University and you can now commence the project should all necessary forms of approval been received.

If you make any substantial changes with ethical implications to the project as it progresses you need to inform the SREC about the nature of these changes. Such changes could be: 1) changes in the type of participants recruited (e.g. inclusion of a group of potentially vulnerable participants), 2) changes to questionnaires, interview guides etc. (e.g. including new questions on sensitive issues), 3) changes to the way data are handled (e.g. sharing of non-anonymised data with other researchers).

In addition, if anything occurs in your project from which you think the SREC might usefully learn, then please do share this information with us.

All ongoing projects will be monitored and you will be obliged periodically to complete and return a SREC monitoring form.

Please inform the SREC when the project has ended.

Please use the SREC's project reference number above in any future correspondence.

Yours sincerely

Professor Alison Bullock
Chair of School of Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee

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