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1 # What role do teaching mentors play in supporting new university lecturers to
2 develop their teaching practices?

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9

10 ## Abstract

11 We examine the support mentors provide to new lecturers as part of a postgraduate
12 programme designed to familiarise them with university teaching. Drawing on qualitative
13 data collected from 13 new lecturers and nine mentors, we document the support new
14 lecturers' call upon to shape their practice. We identify important issues surrounding the
15 significance of mentor choice, both in terms of a mentor's experience, position and knowledge
16 of their role, which determine the effectiveness of professional learning. Difficult issues were
17 observed relating to prioritisation and workload for new lecturers and their mentors, and as a
18 consequence the wider networks of colleagues and peers new lecturers drew upon were seen
19 as an essential source of advice. Indeed, the extent of their use depending on assistance
20 available from mentors. Our data indicate the need for careful framing of mentoring
21 relationships in terms of professional development and teaching enhancement to ensure the
22 benefits of these interactions are realised. Equally both parties need to be encouraged to use
23 reflection to scaffold interactions to promote professional learning. Our data also identify the
24 need for recognition for those performing mentoring roles, to ensure they can dedicate
25 necessary time so that productive relationships are sustained for the duration over which
26 support is required.

27 **Keywords:** Higher Education; Professional Development; Professional Learning;
28 Informal learning, Reflection

29

30 ## Introduction

31 Internationally there has been a proliferation of courses that seek to professionalise
32 the practice of being a university teacher (Kandlbinder and Peseta 2009). The
33 primary focus of this provision is teaching and learning, preparing lecturers to address
34 issues relating to student support, quality assurance, assessment, session and
35 programme design as well as offering feedback on emerging practice (Parson et al.,
36 2012). Studies of these programmes have identified common features including
37 theoretical underpinnings (Kahn *et al.,* 2008), intended outcomes (Bamber 2008) and
38 participants' experiences (Warhurst, 2006). These studies have demonstrated the role
39 of these courses in supporting new lecturers to adapt to the role of being a university
40 lecturer, as in addition to introducing theory and practice, they induct them into the
41 practice of teaching and supporting student learning in their new institutional context,
42 and integrate them into a community that works to support teaching and learning
43 (Smith, 2010; Warhusrt, 2006).

44

45 One aspect of these programmes that has received limited attention has been the role
46 of teaching mentors. These represent a named individual often located in the
47 department or school in which a new lecturer is based who provides guidance around
48 issues related to teaching. Mentors can contextualise the generic or theoretical
49 aspects of teaching preparation programmes to the perspectives of participants'
50 discipline (Gosling, 2009; Knight & Trowler, 1999). They can also be a source of
51 advice around daily practices and procedures, as well as offering feedback on
52 teaching and other issues that may arise (Adcroft & Taylor, 2009). For new lecturers,
53 having a named person to guide them is seen as an invaluable source of support as
54 they adapt to a challenging and demanding role (Barkham, 2005). Therefore, in
55 relation to the volume of research relating to teaching preparation programmes, it is
56 perhaps surprising to note the limited attention teaching mentors have received.
57 Contemporary research tends to concentrate on the perspectives of either the mentor
58 or mentee (e.g. Adcroft and Taylor, 2009; Barkham, 2005; Donnelly and McSweeney,
59 2010) and they are often conducted with limited consideration of the wider support
60 (e.g. colleagues, course peers) new lecturers may draw upon to frame their emerging
61 practice.

62

In this paper we draw on data gathered as part of a study that followed 13 new lecturers, and their mentors, through their first year of university teaching. We provide insights into the role the mentor plays in supporting new lecturers. We also reflect on the importance of the mentor's experience in undertaking this role, and highlight important issues regarding the support, preparation and recognition that mentors receive.

Professionalising university teaching in England

Enhancing the practice of university teaching and supporting student learning is an established feature of the landscape of higher education (HE). In the UK organisations such as the Staff and Educational Development Association and the Association of University Teachers championed the importance of professional development for those involved in teaching and supporting students (Wisdom et al., 2013). These organisations provided staff development, guidance and an accreditation framework for those engaged in training courses to prepare for university teaching. They were also instrumental in creating the UK Professional Standards Framework (HEA, 2011) which is used to guide the practice of university teaching (Wisdom et al., 2013).

Whilst driving forward a clear agenda to professionalise the practice of university teaching, engagement with teaching preparation courses and staff development was variable, depending often on the focus of institutions (i.e. the extent to which they placed an emphasis on teaching and / or research) (Parson et al., 2012). Due to significant changes in the funding of HE, diversification of the student populations and increasing government intervention, teaching and learning has become highly politicised (Gibbs, 2010). Through mechanisms such as the National Students Survey students can publicly comment on the perceived quality of their university experience, in particularly rating their experiences of teaching, learning and assessment; the results of this survey are perceived by some as instrumental in the decisions students make in selecting their choice of university (Kovacs et al., 2010). Following the Browne Review (2010) a focus was also placed upon the training providing to

university staff, with a requirement for universities to report on the number of staff possessing a teaching qualification that has prepared them for university teaching. This has resulted in a change in attitudes toward teaching preparation for new lecturers, with growing expectations for new lecturers to participate in some form of training as part of their probationary commitment (Gosling, 2010; Parsons et al., 2012).

Implicit in this drive is the assumption that by training new lecturers, and aligning their knowledge of teaching and learning to the UKPSF, will enhance the quality of teaching and learning, a concern of policymakers for a number of years (Turner et al., 2013; Gosling, 2009). This is not an assumption we will directly consider here, however, with respect to the wider framing of this study we feel it is an important position to acknowledge, as many of the participants on teaching preparation courses, as well as those working to promote university teaching, are aware of the contentious nature of this assumption and the implications it has on the expectations for university teaching (Gibbs, 2010; Quinn 2012). However, England is not alone in pushing forward an agenda for enhancing university teaching, similar moves towards providing training for new lecturers, professional development for established lectures and examining student feedback have taken place across Europe, North America, New Zealand and Australia (Kandlbinder and Peseta 2009; Parson et al., 2012).

Professional learning in the workplace

Entry into a new workplace stimulates a period of professional learning, which can take place through a series of formal and informal interactions (Eraut, 2004; 2007; Knight et al. 2006). Formal learning entails pre-determined outcomes and taught sessions; by contrast, informal learning is a hidden process that results from unstructured or opportunistic interactions and experiences, and is associated with tacit knowledge (Eraut, 2004; Knight e*t al.,* 2006). This aligns with the idea of the distributed apprenticeship element of professional learning, whereby a range of individuals (e.g. colleagues, peers, trainers) stimulate professional learning, through deliberative, reactive and implicit actions (Eraut, 2004). Much professional learning

is informal and occurs as a consequence of an individual performing their role and interacting with colleagues (Eraut, 2004). Therefore in many instances newcomers are not explicitly aware of learning about their role, rather they express a sense of feeling more comfortable in what they are doing or of growing in confidence (Eraut, 2004; Knight et al., 2006). This demonstrates the situated nature of professional learning, where activities such as conversations make significant contributions to newcomers' understandings of the workplace (Haigh, 2005). In many instances such learning is unplanned and *ad hoc*, and the quality of professional learning that takes place is highly variable.

In relation to these informal mechanisms of professional learning, mentoring blurs the boundaries of formal and informal learning (Eraut, 2007). Mentoring is widely used to familiarise newcomers to the workplace and support them in developing technical, interpersonal and political skills and competences essential to their role (Hudson, 2013; Ehrich *et al.,* 2004; Ragins and Cotton, 1999). Researchers (e.g. Kram, 1983; Hobson *et al.,* 2009; Noe, 1988) have identified mentors as having specific career development and psychosocial functions, as explored through Kram's (1983) Mentor Role Theory. These career development functions involve actions such as sponsorship, advocacy, coaching, protection, providing challenging assignments and offering exposure (Kram, 1983). As a newcomer's position in an organisation changes, and they realise their potential, the requirements on a mentor changes (Kram, 1983; Gehrke, 1988). An assumption underpinning the role of a mentor is that they themselves are in a role that allows them to perform these functions, and also have the knowledge, skills and experience on which to draw to support a junior colleague (Kram, 1983).

Mentoring may involve a structured programme of support through which goals are set, shaping interactions and monitoring progress, usually through a series of regular meetings (Donnelly and McSweeny 2010). In these instances the mentor usually gains recognition for the support they offer. Informal mentoring relationships are less structured with limited recognition of the process and outcomes (Ehrich *et al.,* 2004; Ewing *et al.,* 2008). Regardless of the approach, mentoring is recognised as having a

157 number of benefits for both the newcomer and the mentor (Ragins and Cotton, 1999).
158 For the mentee, it can create a sense of collegiality and belonging that promotes
159 understanding of a new workplace (Donnelly and McSweeney 2010). Studies of
160 mentors' experiences note that mentoring creates situations for reciprocal learning
161 since, by supporting a new colleague, mentors can engage with self-reflection,
162 stimulating their own professional learning (Barkham, 2005; Kamvounias *et al.,*
163 2008). Overall, effective mentoring relationships have been identified as increasing
164 staff retention, job satisfaction and career progression (Ehrich *et al.,* 2004; Ragins and
165 Cotton, 1999).

166

167 Research into professional learning and mentoring has led to the idea of 'relationship
168 constellations' (e.g. Higgins and Kram, 2001: 264); these represent the range of
169 individuals who may provide developmental support through an individual's career,
170 in addition to that traditionally provided by a mentor. This reflects the portfolio
171 nature of individual careers and the shift in focus to development taking place on an
172 on-going basis throughout an individual's professional life (Higgins and Kram, 2001).
173 Nowadays 'mentoring' may be provided through formal, e.g. organisational structures
174 associated with induction or progression through the workplace, or informally,
175 through support offered by colleagues to one-another. In these instances individuals
176 stimulate or promote the professional learning of colleagues with a view to supporting
177 their establishment, and or progression, in the workplace.

178

179 A portfolio career typifies the early career trajectory of academics, who usually gain a
180 lecturing position after completing a period of research training and post doctoral
181 work, therefore they commonly bring with them an established network of researchers
182 and former colleagues (Archer, 2008). Through a teaching qualification they may be
183 introduced to a new community of peers, as documented in studies by researchers
184 such as Smith (2010) and Warhurst (2006), as well as provided with a teaching
185 mentor. With respect to teaching qualifications for new lecturers, teaching mentors
186 have an important role to play in contextualising the general, theoretical and practice-
187 based principles of these programmes. Knight and Trowler (1999) highlighted the
188 importance of mentors in providing an individualised experience, particularly when

189 they are located in the environment in which professional learning will occur (i.e.)
190 new lecturers' home departments. Mentors assist in decoding the systems and
191 structures that underpin new lecturers' roles (Adcroft and Taylor, 2009). From this
192 perspective, mentoring assists in the management of the multiple demands placed on
193 new lecturers and, therefore, it is reasonable to envisage mentors as integral in
194 supporting them to adapt to their role.

195

196 The contribution that mentoring is perceived to make to taught programmes for new
197 lecturers is less well documented. In relation to the highly organised nature of these
198 programmes (Bamber, 2008), mentoring relationships appear to be less formalised
199 and new lecturers' experiences of mentoring are reported as variable (Kamvounias *et*
200 *al.,* 2008; Remmik *et al.,* 2011). Combinations of formal and informal approaches are
201 used, with a tendency for the informal approach to prevail. Whilst a mentor may be
202 committed to supporting a new lecturer, they may receive limited recognition or time
203 to do so; in such situations there is a danger that mentoring can be an additional
204 burden, threatening to undermine the potential development that could be achieved.

205

206 **Methodology**

207 ***Research aims***

208 Teaching is recognised as a context-specific profession (Trigwell and Prosser, 1996)
209 shaped by the experiences and values a lecturer possesses; however, these are rarely
210 acknowledged in the preparation that new lecturers receive on commencing their role.
211 Nor does this preparation readily acknowledge the diverse professional and cultural
212 profiles of the academic workforce. The research we report here is part of a wider
213 study (Turner et al., 2012) that examined how lecturers negotiated their existing
214 knowledge and experiences of teaching and learning / university life with those they
215 were introduced to through the postgraduate teaching qualification and the wider
216 University's values and ethos around teaching and learning. Existing research on
217 both professional learning (e.g. Eraut, 2004; Knight et al., 2006) and postgraduate
218 teaching qualifications (e.g. Boud and Brew, 2012; Reintes and Kichin, 2014;
219 Warhurst, 2006) identify the importance of mentors, departmental colleagues and

220 peers from established / new networks in supporting newcomers to develop the
221 professional knowledge and confidence required to perform their role. Therefore, to
222 examine how new lecturers reconciled or integrated their existing knowledge and
223 experience with the requirements of their new role and workplace, we recognised the
224 importance of considering the networks, both those initiated through the teaching
225 qualification (e.g. mentors and tutors) and those drawn upon by the new lecturers (e.g.
226 course peers, new colleagues and established networks) to support them in their first
227 year of teaching. Here we present this aspect of the study, however, full details of the
228 research methods are giving in order to contextualise the work that was undertaken.

229

230 ***The research setting***

231 The research was based in a so-called ‘new’ (post-1992) university in the UK.
232 Completion of a postgraduate certificate in teaching and learning is tied to
233 probationary requirements; lecturers with less than three years full-time teaching
234 experience are required to complete the programme. As noted above, compulsory
235 professional development for new lecturers in increasingly commonplace, giving
236 lecturers little opportunity to shape or direct the initial training they receive to prepare
237 them for lecturing (Parsons et al., 2012). The course begins by providing a general
238 introduction to the practices of teaching, supporting and assessing students. A series
239 of elective modules provides space for greater consideration of agendas relevant to
240 contemporary HE e.g. employability. The programme can be completed within 12
241 months, and following this lecturers are recognised as Fellows of the HEA.

242

243 During the programme lecturers are allocated a tutor from the course team, required
244 to identify a mentor and encouraged to discuss their experiences with colleagues and
245 peers. Course tutors and mentors have clearly defined roles; tutors observe the new
246 lecturers and provide feedback, assess their written work and offer ‘generic’ advice on
247 teaching, learning and supporting students. Teaching mentors are integral in
248 supporting lecturers in contextualising pedagogic theory and practice to the
249 disciplinary communities in which they operate. Therefore mentors can be drawn

from across the University. The mentor also undertakes a teaching review and offers local support on teaching related issues.

New lecturers select their mentor independently, although the course team recommend they choose someone who has either recently completed the programme or an advocate for teaching in their school. Mentors received guidance on their role which includes; meetings to discuss progress on the programme, sharing ideas and acting as a critical friend, undertaking a teaching observation, promoting participation in developmental events and integrating their mentee into their school. The teaching team allow the mentor and mentee to develop their own ways of working and, in this respect the model of mentoring promoted would be classed as informal (Donnelly and McSweeney, 2010). Although the teaching team advocate the importance of these mentoring relationships they are not in a position to offer recognition or reward to mentors. Based on the literature used to examine the role of mentoring in professional learning, there are potential limitations to newcomers selecting their mentor and taking an informal approach to the mentoring relationship (Adcroft and Taylor, 2009). The ability of a mentor to performing functions such as advocacy and protection, and ensuring time is dedicated to ensure a productive mentoring relationship develop is not explicitly considered in this approach. Indeed these are all issues pertinent to the outcomes of this work.

Recruitment

A purposeful sample of 13 participants was selected from those starting the programme in September 2011. Previous studies (e.g. Boyd and Harris, 2010; Green and Maytt, 2011) acknowledged the diverse professional profiles of new lecturers. As a result, the knowledge, experience and expectations they bring to university teaching can be varied. Participants were selected to encompass this diversity, with invitations made based on participants' country of origin and professional / research backgrounds, and more widely to be representative of the cohort as a whole with respect to gender and disciplinary areas (see Table 1). In order to gain an insight into the context (e.g. department and disciplines) in which the new lecturers were working and also support

they received, their teaching mentors were invited to participate; nine agreed to contribute with others declining due to commitments during the scheduled period of data collection. Details of mentors are presented in Table 2.

[Place Table 1 here]

[Place Table 2 here]

Data collection

Qualitative data were collected using a combination of methods over the duration of the whole research project, including the data reported here. Data from new lecturers were collected at two points in the academic year; firstly following the induction period of the taught programme then at the end of the teaching year. The initial phase of data collection was split into a one-hour teaching observation, completed using a semi-structured observation protocol, and an in-depth interview. This approach captured espoused reflections on practice and actions taken in practice. The observation protocol was informed by Kreber's (1999) Scholarship of Teaching model. Kreber (1999) states that in learning about teaching, individuals engage in content, process and premise reflections in the three domains of teaching knowledge, which are instructional, pedagogical and curricular. The protocol was designed to capture actions which may be indicative of these domains of knowledge and forms of reflection, as well as general information regarding the teaching session (e.g. format of the teaching session, class size). A provisional analysis of the observation protocols was used as the basis of a stimulated-recall interview (Calderhead, 1981).

At stage two the new lecturers were asked to bring a critical incident from the reflective logs kept as part of the programme to be discussed during the second interview. The use of critical incidents in this way was informed by Tripp (1993) and, once again, sought to examine their knowledge of teaching. Following discussion of the critical incident, questions were asked regarding their practice, support they

received, with prompts from stage one to stimulate reflections on how this had changed and developed.

Data were gathered from the mentors half way through the academic year. This timeframe was selected as it followed submission of the first assignment and was rationalised as to have been a time when mentors may have been called upon to support new lecturers in reaching this deadline. Through a semi-structured interview with mentors we gained further insights into the emerging practice of the new lecturers, a background to the teaching practices of participant's schools, school support for participants and their experiences of mentoring. It is this data, along with the responses drawn from the new lecturers regarding the support they drew upon over the academic year, which we report here. Provisional findings from the wider study have been reported in Turner et al., (2012).

Data analysis

All interview data were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim. Content analysis was employed to "mak[e] inferences by objectively and systematically identifying specified characteristics of messages" (Holsti, 1969:14). The analysis heeded the research aims, however, in the context of support networks drawn upon and interactions with mentors, we paid particularly attention to the interactions that took place and how these evolved. We were also mindful of Kreber's (1999) categories, specifically those relating to that ways in which individuals reflect on their teaching. These were considered when analysing the accounts of conversations around teaching and learning that took place between the mentors and mentees were examined (i.e. were they focused on discussing the content, process or premise relating to their practice). Following the analyses these themes emerged across both data sets:

- Mentor choice;
- Shaping expectations;
- Promoting professional learning through reflection;
- Pressures and tensions;

340 - Gifts of mentoring;
341 - Developing sustainable mentoring relationships.

342 In the next section, we will examine each of these themes in turn to uncover the
343 nature of the mentoring relationships, the support networks used and how these
344 changed over the year.

345

346 **Findings**

347 *Choosing a mentor*

348 The new lecturers had been University employees for varying timescales. A few had
349 arrived toward the end of the previous academic year; however, most had arrived
350 immediately prior to the start of the taught programme. Therefore, the extent to
351 which they *knew* their colleagues varied, with implications for their mentor choice.
352 This was also shaped by the new lecturers' intentions and aspirations for the
353 mentoring relationship. Given the explicit links between the mentor and the teaching
354 programme, most participants selected mentors in line with the role prescribed by the
355 teaching team (i.e. someone who had either completed the course recently or were
356 recognised as experienced teachers):

357 '[…] he was the most recent appointment in the department and quite familiar
358 with the process.' Lecturer 3

359 'I chose my mentor due to her academic and lecturing experience'. Lecturer 6

360

361 Two new lecturers were allocated a mentor by someone else, which may imply that
362 the school recognised that they may need assistance in knowing from whom to seek
363 support.

364

365 Although these rationales appear reasonable, each had implications for the mentoring
366 relationships and patterns of interaction. Those who selected recent completers of
367 the teaching programme tended to approach them to primarily seek advice on the
368 module choice, assignments and programme-related concerns. In contrast those who

369 opted for established colleagues tended to engage in discussions around wider
370 teaching practices and school procedures beginning to engage with what Kreber (1999)
371 would identify as curricular knowledge (i.e. developing an awareness of how their
372 teaching connected to the wider curriculum):

373 '[…] my mentor has a lot of experience, so she's got quite a good few
374 connections […] for example I haven't done a lot around marking assignments
375 so she's set up a session where we can go and learn a bit about that and
376 observe some [names assessment format]'. Lecturer 6

377 Whilst these interactions addressed the concerns new lecturers experienced, the
378 relationships that developed varied, which may be attributable to the differing roles
379 the mentors performed. Recent completers perceived themselves familiar with the
380 challenges of being a new lecturer and the teaching programme. They were keen to
381 provide an empathic ear, but they were aware of their own limitations:

382 'I'm a year and a half into my post here and I very much had to learn by doing
383 and doing things wrong sometimes.' Mentor 8

384 As this quotation suggests, the extent to which recent completers could socialise their
385 mentee into their school depended on the level to which they themselves were
386 integrated. But equally, as Eraut (2004) cautions, whilst established colleagues would
387 be integrated, their working practices might have become habitual so they may no
388 longer be aware of what a newcomer needed to know. This was evidenced by
389 established mentors' responses to questioning during interviews regarding the
390 pedagogical theories and practice associated with their schools - many struggled to
391 initially name any. Yet this appeared not to be a significant concern of their mentees,
392 as they tended to use their mentors to inform their teaching practices more generally
393 rather than to address queries relating to the teaching programme or seeking to
394 stimulate reflections on their emerging practice that may connect to pedagogical or
395 instructional knowledge (Kreber, 1999).

396

397 *Shaping expectations*

398 Findings suggest that both parties accepted their role uncritically, with mentors'
399 actions largely informed by their position (i.e. recent completer or established
400 lecturer). It was not evident whether mentors and new lecturers discussed their role or
401 established goals to structure their relationship. Instead an informal approach was
402 adopted, in line with the recommendations of the teaching team, leading to variable
403 mentoring relationships developing. They ranged from mentors and mentees working
404 collaboratively in what *they* viewed as productive relationships, to those where the
405 mentor was removed from the process with the implicit expectation that the mentee
406 would be in touch if necessary:

407 'I've been lucky enough to monitor what he's been doing; I sat in and did a
408 teaching observation for him. I was very pleased to see how he was dealing
409 with his students – the kind of feedback he was giving, the kind of questions
410 he was raising – and his interaction with the students seemed to be very
411 positive.' Mentor 1

412 'Basically people are left to get on with it and I think intervention is taken if
413 things start to go wrong and I think what you have to do is let people get on
414 and do a good job.' Mentor 9

415 Given the multiple pressures lecturers face (Smith, 2010), being 'left to get on with it'
416 (Mentor 9), may not be unexpected, and indeed could be a consequence of the
417 perceived responsibility mentors attributed to the taught programme for supporting
418 new lecturers:

419 'Any teaching education/philosophy/practice will be got from the teaching
420 course; or perhaps any other articles they may have independently read. But
421 they are not coming from a top-down direction in the School; that's not how it
422 works at all.' Mentor 2

423 These perceptions could have implications for the quality of, and potential for,
424 professional learning, particularly when these interactions are considered in light of
425 the situated nature of academic development (Boud, 1999). For the new lecturer,
426 connections need to be made between the formal learning of the taught programme
427 and, more generally, through interactions with colleagues, students and the process of
428 doing their job. Mentors are integral to formulating these connections and

429 contextualising learning to new lecturers' disciplines and schools. However, the
430 perceived value of mentoring held by mentors could constrain the extent to which
431 meaningful learning occurs.

432

433 Comparing the established lecturers with the recent completers it appeared that
434 initially it was the experienced lecturers who appeared to struggle with being mentors,
435 tending to take a step back, perhaps concerned about the workload implications of
436 supporting a colleague. This contrasts the position of the recent completers who were
437 able to recall the extent to which they benefitted from the support of a mentor. As
438 Mentor 1 indicates, once engaged in the process, established lecturers began to
439 appreciate the benefits to the new lecturer and also began to consider how forums (e.g.
440 working groups/programme meetings) to discuss teaching could represent informal
441 learning opportunities for new lecturers:

442 'So I mean that I suppose in terms of pedagogy, we had a working party and
443 we spent a lot of time thinking about it so I would say about half the
444 department would be involved in it, so we did spend a lot of time thinking
445 about how we might improve that first year for our students and of course
446 [names mentee] been crucially involved in this process.' Mentor 5

447 These examples provide an insight into the pedagogical workings of schools and
448 demonstrate how informal opportunities for professional learning emerge which
449 allows new lecturers to begin to integrate theoretical knowledge (instructional
450 knowledge) with disciplinary-specific perspectives (instructional or curricular
451 knowledge) (Trowler and Cooper, 2002). They also represent incidences where
452 reflections were stimulated that allowed the new lecturers to explore or develop their
453 pedagogical knowledge (Kreber, 1999). Such interactions have been noted by
454 researchers (e.g. Remmik et al. 2011; Warhurst 2008) as representing valuable
455 opportunities to share their own experiences and perspectives with their colleagues,
456 further promoting the integration of new lecturers into their school as they gain a
457 sense of making a contribution. As Mentor 5 indicates, these interactions were
458 common-place, and therefore mentors need to be made aware of the regularity at
459 which professional learning can occur as part of the preparation they are given prior
460 to taking on this role.

461

Promoting professional learning through reflection

462 Reflection is integral to the process of mentoring (Barkham, 2005; Gosling, 2009). School-based studies of mentoring have identified both the critical examination of a new teachers practice and their thinking about practice as essential in developing a sense of being an accomplished teacher (Hagger and MacIntyre, 2006). Mentors, who may be perceived as expert teachers, play a fundamental role in this process by assisting a new teacher comprehend what 'good' teaching represents (Gosling, 2009; Langdon, 2011). However, these studies have reported that mentors face challenges in supporting new teachers in undergoing this development and engaging with effective reflective practices (Langdon, 2011). If this is the situation in school-based teacher development, then it is perhaps not surprising in this study that we found the limited extent to which reflective practice underpinned mentoring interactions. With respect to the development of university-based teachers, Trowler and Cooper (2002) noted disciplinary differences in relation to an individual's predisposition to reflection, with those from the sciences in particular struggling with this activity. Given that seven of our participants were drawn from these disciplines this could account for this situation. The primary source of reflection was the teaching observation mentors completed as part of the teaching programme. Commonly discussions between mentors and the new lecturers tended to be functional, concentrating either on effective practice (i.e. what works) or providing advice and information either deemed essential by the mentor or in response to a mentees request:

> 'I was concerned about my accent, the local students would not be able to understand my accent, the feedbacks that I got from [my] mentor, said it's fine, you can understand everything.' Lecturer 4

> 'I suppose the most important one of all is kind of informal discussions that we would have about our own practice and things that went wrong or things that worked well and so on, so I think that's a big part that sometimes we don't acknowledge the importance of that enough.' Mentor 7

Whilst it is important for the mentee to be able to access information central to their practice, the emphasis from new lecturers requesting, and mentors providing,

functional information can lead to a focus on prescriptive rather than innovative practice. This has been observed as a limitation in the use of reflection to support the development of lecturers teaching practice (e.g. Gosling, 2009; Hammersley-Fletcher and Orsmond, 2005). Such interactions are described as indicating a 'reductive' approach to mentoring resulting from its narrow conceptualisation (e.g. Achinstein and Athanases, 2006). In the context of our study, this approach may have also emerged due to the patterns of interactions between the new lecturer and the mentor, and a perceived lack of time in the department that lecturers can dedicate to reflection:

> 'There's not an awful lot of time for reflection […]. We build meetings into the system – on Wednesday afternoons we'll have this meeting, that meeting. I think it would be more useful if there was some more sort of structured reflection for teaching activities.' Mentor 2

> 'I can remember in the past when we decided to make changes in the programmes and spent a year talking about what the changes would be, everybody was involved in those discussions, everybody was passionate about carrying those changes forward. And I don't know where that debate happens any longer, because there just isn't the time for it.' Mentor 1

As these mentors acknowledge, time is pressured. The new lecturers' primary concerns were with doing a good job, completing the teaching programme, and surviving the year. They demonstrated limited capacity for reflecting on practice and therefore this is a role mentors should encourage, particularly in the early stages of the mentoring relationship when lecturers may be overwhelmed with the demands placed upon them. As advocated by Gosling (2009), mentors could request mentees bring 'critical incidents' or examples from their practice that could provide a stimulus for further discussion and reflection in their meetings. This may also serve to move the mentee beyond focusing solely on practical challenges or immediate concerns by encouraging a wider appreciation of the contribution that reflection can make to enhancing teaching practice.

Pressures and tensions

The first few years of lecturing are challenging and, although this is well-documented (e.g. Smith 2010), we feel it is important to reframe these challenges in relation to mentoring. The new lecturers documented the challenges they experienced (e.g. concerns with workload; designing modules; balancing research, teaching and institutional ways of working) and whilst these may have been the source of considerable personal frustration and pressure, they do represent the challenges experienced by *all* new lecturers (Smith, 2010; Warhurst, 2006). Mentors were acutely aware of, and empathised with, the challenges faced:

> 'A fair teaching load, in order to settle into teaching do [names course], start establishing yourself as research active [...] there's just a lot and everything is urgent.' Mentor 10

> 'I think the main point I got from her was that she felt she was being pulled in lots of directions she wanted to continue her research and she had to think about her teaching.' Mentor 8

However, there was a sense of powerlessness from mentors around the extent to which they could assist their mentees in resolving their challenges. This could partly be related to the role the mentors adopted, in that most saw themselves as primarily offering guidance relating to teaching and felt that it was beyond their remit to address wider concerns:

> 'And I just thought new members of staff needed more support than that, but I wasn't in a position to be able to say that shouldn't happen because ultimately, the Head of School decides workloads.' Mentor 2

This sense of powerlessness could also depend on the extent to which mentors were familiar with the working practices of their school and also their role power. Interestingly, two new lecturers selected mentors from outside their school. Whilst this may provide greater opportunities for networking, as with the recent completeters, these mentors might have not have been in a position to respond to functional questions regarding procedures in their mentees' school. Thus, proximity may also be a factor in mentor choice. Similarly, a mentor who is a recent completer or from another school may not be in a position to act as an advocate or support their mentee in reconciling challenges.

554

555 Either one, or a combination, of these positions could lead to the mentor experiencing
556 a sense of powerlessness in relation to the support they could provide, with wider
557 implications for how the role of a mentor is perceived. Mentors are required to
558 possess skills such as the ability to be an advocate and act as a role model,
559 demonstrating confidence and efficacy as a professional (Donnelly and McSweeney,
560 2010; Kram, 1983). However, if the mentor does not feel they can support their
561 mentee through challenging times, or address practical concerns, it could undermine
562 their relationship. If this happens at the formative stages of their relationship it may
563 hinder potential for professional learning through mentoring, which would require
564 new lecturers to seek alternative sources of support.

565

566 *Gifts of mentoring*

567 The mentors who developed a wider appreciation of issues relating to teaching and
568 learning through the interactions with their mentees recognised what Kamvounias *et*
569 *al.,* (2008) referred to as the "gifts" of mentoring, indicating the mutually beneficial
570 nature of mentoring relationships:

571 > 'I've found it to be a really valuable experience too as a mentor, I've really
572 > enjoyed it and it's nice to be able to help somebody in the way that you may or
573 > may not have been helped in the past. So that I think is quite useful.' Mentor
574 > 5

575 There was a sense that such benefits were unanticipated, perhaps indicating a limited
576 perception of mentoring as uni-directional, only of benefit to the newcomer (Donnelly
577 and McSweeney, 2010). It could also imply the perception held by the mentor,
578 mentee or both, that the mentoring aspect of the taught programme was an additional
579 burden. Indeed, this was a position noted by a recent completer:

580 > "Yes, I think a lot of people were happy for me to knock on their door and ask
581 > them very straightforward questions because I think they'd been there before,
582 > but it's a burden on them and it's a waste of their time." Mentor 8

583 This is perhaps an unspoken concern of mentors and could have resulted in the
584 tendency, whereby, if the new lecturer appeared to be coping, they were left to
585 develop their practice independently.

586 ‘Basically people are left to get on with it and I think intervention is taken if
587 things start to go wrong, and I’ve no evidence at all that that’s the case, so I
588 think it’s going fine and I think what you have to do is let people get on, if
589 they’re doing a good job you need to let them get on and do a good job.’
590 Mentor 9

591 ‘[Learning to teach] it’s immersive, it’s “Get in there,” it’s “Do it”, it’s
592 “Contact people who are doing things that...” If you want to try and develop a
593 new practical class, go and speak to this person who’s done something like
594 that.’ Mentor 2

595 Equally, mentees were concerned about giving the impression that they were not
596 coping or did not know what they were doing. These perspectives could limit the
597 potential for learning and development, arguably leading mentoring relationships to
598 stagnate or falter. However, the approaches suggested above by mentors to create
599 learning opportunities for new lecturers through everyday practices and interactions at
600 a school level could partly challenge this burdensome perception.

601

602 *Developing sustainable mentoring relationships*

603 Findings showed that mentoring relationships developed organically, due to factors
604 such as individuals’ experience, school support, and the perceived benefits of
605 mentoring. Given the connection between the taught programme and mentoring,
606 mentors perceived it as their remit to support new lecturers to develop their teaching.
607 Indeed, whilst one mentor recognised the importance of their role in respect of this
608 programme, they made a distinction between the perceived contributions they could
609 make to different aspects of a new lecturer’s role:

610 ‘Having a mentor is I think quite crucial, I think you do need somebody to do
611 some of the more sort of complex questions about approaches to teaching, you
612 know, those bigger discussions that you can have with somebody and research

> as well because that's equally important. But also you do need a named person to go to for all the really dull and boring details that you do actually need to learn.' Mentor 5

This mentor perceived their role as functional, primarily assisting their mentee in developing their teaching. This narrow conception meant that rather than supporting the new lecturer to holistically reflect on and develop their role, they concentrated solely on teaching. This is an interesting standpoint; it does not reflect the complexity of the lecturing role that encompasses a growing remit of research, teaching and administrative activities (Adcroft and Taylor, 2009; Smith, 2010). Instead it implies a perceived fragmentation in the different aspects of the role of being a university lecturer. Given that new lecturers are recognised as struggling to reconcile the breadth of their responsibilities this is not a useful position for a mentor to adopt.

The teaching programme lasted one academic year, with a mentor expected to support their mentee during this time. Explicit responsibilities were allocated to the mentor with respect to the first module of the course. As this coincides with the busiest period for most new lecturers in terms of adapting to their role, we observed the greatest number of mentor-mentee interactions occurred then. Further analysis indicated that interactions with mentors decreased over the academic year. This appeared to have implications on the use of alternate networks of support the new lecturers drew upon in their first year of teaching. Interactions with wider networks align with the idea of the distributed apprenticeship element of professional learning, the quality of which depends on the willingness of individuals to stimulate learning (Eraut, 2007; Knight *et al.,* 2006). For instance, colleagues were seen as an essential network new lecturers actively sought to integrate with. The regularity of use was related to physical proximity (i.e. in the office next door) or perceptions that they possessed relevant knowledge:

> 'There's a certain amount of things you need to know beforehand and you actually learn it when you get to the point where you need to use it and when you've got supportive colleagues around you, it's great because you realise you're a bit stuck and out of your depth and you can ask them and then they help you.' Lecturer 8

In addition, new lecturers discussed their practice with peers, former colleagues and personal contacts. There was a sense in which discussing teaching with such individuals 'low risk' as they were not exposing a lack of knowledge to a colleague or mentor. These interactions were largely unplanned and, following Eraut (2007), would be perceived as information sharing. There is a risk that the resulting conversations (and the related advice) were accepted uncritically without examination of underpinning assumptions or implications for their practice (Haigh, 2005). In addition, there was often a sense that colleagues had limited time and, therefore, interactions were restricted to 'snatched conversations' (Lecturer 13). This creates the additional risk that new lecturers could spend considerable time trying to find information from a number of colleagues as initially (at least) they may not know who to contact for specific information (e.g. queries relating to timetabling, exams and course administration).

Mentoring relationships are recognised as time-limited (Ehrich *et al.,* 2004) so it is unsurprising that interactions reduced. However, a premature end or reduction in mentor support could leave a mentee with either a false sense of professional confidence, or more likely, struggling to address new challenges as they arise. This is an important consideration with respect to the cycle through which university teaching operates. Initially teaching and student support is the focus of lecturers' attention, followed by a period of examination and quality assurance. The second half of the teaching programme for new lecturers considers academic practice more widely. Reduced interactions may mean they have limited opportunity to contextualise and clarify this knowledge at the site at which it will be practiced. Although they may continue to discuss their changing practice with colleagues, peers or personal contacts, members of each of these groups can hold particular values, ideas or beliefs relating to teaching and learning which, due to the informal nature of the interactions with new lecturers, may not be examined in relation to the resulting advice and guidance (Eraut, 2007; Haigh, 2005).

Conclusions

Teaching development programmes are central to the professionalisation of university teaching, with mentors performing an essential role in assisting new lecturers to contextualise their practice. Although we report on a small-scale study based in one UK University, we provide insights into a relatively under-researched area within the field of academic development. Our study problematized the contribution mentors can make to the development of new lecturers and considered actions that may support new lecturers emerging practice.

Factors such as the choice of a mentor and mentor's experience as a lecturer emerged as impacting mentoring relationships and in turn professional learning. The significance of mentor choice is somewhat underplayed, particularly with respect to the guidance new lecturers received in selecting a mentor. As our data demonstrates, who becomes a mentor impacts the support received, with factors such as the mentors proximity, experience and knowledge of a schools' practice and procedures determining the guidance they are able to provide. We have to question whether a recent completer of the teaching qualification would be able to fulfil actions such as advocacy or protection to the same extent as a more established colleague. Equally, an established lecturer from the same school in relation to one of similar experience but from a different school to the one in which the mentee is based. Therefore at a fundamental level the choice of mentor can have a clear impact on the success of a relationship and the level of professional learning that may take place.

Differing conceptions of mentoring were evident, with most mentors perceiving mentoring as uni-directional, representing an additional role to be accommodated alongside already busy workloads and needs of both mentor and mentee. These factors lead to the emergence of situations whereby either mentees wanted to convey a perception of coping or, alternatively, of mentors assuming that unless they had evidence to the contrary their mentee was successfully performing their role. This impacted on the quality of mentoring relationships, and could also lead to a reliance on other forms of support. This situation may be alleviated through formal recognition of the role the mentor is performing. Indeed, in studies where institutional recognition is forthcoming (e.g. through time allocations or connections

708 with mechanisms for continuing professional development) (e.g. Barkham, 2005)
709 mentoring relationships were characterised by developmental milestones, regular
710 meetings, and benefits regularly been reported for both parties. These mentoring
711 relationships also appear to have lasted longer than those observed within this study,
712 progressing through a number of clear stages (e.g. initiation, cultivation, separation
713 and redefinition), with roles such as advocacy and protections performed, and
714 professional benefits experienced by both parties (Kram, 1983; Barkham, 2005).
715 Although such benefits were recorded, with mentoring cited as creating opportunities
716 for local discussions around teaching and learning, these were noted in only a
717 minority of cases. It is proposed that formal recognition both with respect to the
718 process of mentoring, and also within individuals' workloads, may result in more
719 productive and longer-lasting mentoring relationships. In order to achieve this,
720 support from university managers (e.g. head of schools / deans) would be essential,
721 particularly with respect to formalising mentoring relationships. Such moves may be
722 timely, given the moves within the UK through the UKPSF to further recognise and
723 accredit the teaching experiences of more established lecturers, and provide a career
724 trajectory for those with an explicit interest in teaching rather than disciplinary-based
725 research (HEA, 2011).

726

727 Recognising mentoring relationships would ensure dedicated time is allocated for
728 mentoring and situations for professional learning are fostered. It is not to say these
729 were not present in the study university, rather it would have ensured parity.
730 Interactions between the mentor and new lecturer also need to encourage critical
731 interrogation and reflection on the practice of both parties to enhance individuals'
732 awareness of the values, beliefs and concepts that underpin practice (Kreber, 1999;
733 Trowler and Cooper, 2002). These were actions that were observed to be challenging,
734 with the tendency for functional or practical discussions to prevail. This is where the
735 integration of critical incidents or raising awareness of Haigh's (2005) idea of
736 'learningful conversations' may prove advantageous, as both could be used to support
737 new lecturers to understand how actions taken in practice promote student learning.

738

739 Although wider support networks have an important role to play, the contribution
740 made to professional learning needs to be framed in relation to the nature of the
741 interactions that are taking place. They provide a valuable source of informal advice
742 and guidance. Regular interactions within these wider networks also assist new
743 lecturers to develop a sense of belonging (Warhurst, 2008). We need to enhance new
744 lecturers awareness of using this wider networks to stimulate professional learning
745 and provide mechanisms for meaningful engagement with them. To date, this is an
746 area that although of growing prominence (e.g. Boud and Brew, 2012; Reintes and
747 Kichin, 2014) has not been fully explored with respect to promoting academic
748 development, which is an area worthy of further consideration to identify how they
749 can be used to promote professional learning.

750

751 In this study, we have captured data on interactions between new lecturers, their
752 mentors, and wider support networks over one academic year. Within the context of
753 this study the majority of the mentoring relationships were coming to an end toward
754 the end of the academic year. As we have noted, in business, schools and other
755 settings where mentoring is a feature of professional development, mentoring
756 relationships may be sustained until a natural end is reached (Kram, 1983; Ragins and
757 Cotton, 1999). We recommend further research into mentoring relationships for those
758 new to lecturing which examines more specifically the instigation, development and
759 termination of these relationships. Such research also needs to consider more
760 explicitly interactions with wider support networks, particularly with respect to the
761 learning they promote. Likewise, it would need to heed the context in which many
762 new lecturers are working, in that as well as undertaking a teaching qualification they
763 will be balancing their research commitments and potentially other administrative
764 roles. As mentoring may be specifically tied to the teaching qualification, the
765 mechanisms of support for the wider aspects of a new lecturer's role could provide
766 valuable insights into how mentoring could be integrated more holistically into the
767 professional development for new academics over the longer term.

768

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773

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