What models of paired trainee placements in secondary ICT departments provide the kind of environment that enhances the quality of the placement and improves the mentoring process?

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ABSTRACT

The current study investigates different models of paired placements in schools concentrating on ICT trainees though the findings have implications for all teacher training programmes. A number of case-studies were carried out to investigate how paired placements are implemented in practice and to find out the views of trainees and school mentors about what is effective. The conclusions emphasise the importance of briefing the trainees and mentors about the expectations of this type of placement and a recommendation that, where possible, one mentor is responsible for both trainees to ensure a consistent approach. This does mean that the mentor will need more time as it is clear that as well as joint meetings the trainees need individual meetings at times. Whilst pairing in the first placement should, if possible, be the norm to encourage cooperative and collaborative working, in subsequent placements, the views of the trainees should be taken into account when arranging paired placements. Overall the study emphasises the need for guidance to be provided to mentors to help them organise and implement paired placements.

INTRODUCTION TO THE PAIRED PLACEMENT PROJECTS

This is a collaborative, cross-institutional research study by the NW ICT Tutors' Group which covers universities in the North-West of England that provide PGCE secondary ICT courses. The group consists of Edge Hill University, Liverpool Hope University, University of Cumbria and Liverpool John Moores University. Representatives from each institution have been meeting on a regular basis over the last four years to discuss issues of mutual benefit and recently the focus has been on the use of paired placements for secondary ICT PGCE trainees.

Background

In 2007/8 the group identified the need to encourage more schools to consider the advantages of paired placements and to increase the number of trainees who would be able to benefit from this type of placement. It was decided to find out the views of trainees and school mentors who were involved in paired placements and interviews and filming took place in a number of partner schools (of each institution) to identify the advantages and disadvantages of paired placements. The interviews were analysed and a DVD was produced which was then distributed to partner schools. The DVD was well-received and has been used for training with trainees and school mentors as well as an aid to persuade schools to take paired placements.

Current Project

As more schools offered paired placements it became clear from mentor feedback that there was a need to provide more focussed advice and information about how paired placements can be successfully implemented. In order to allow flexibility as to how paired placements were organised the four providers did not provide a prescriptive format for the paired placement, in terms of, for example , the amount of time to be spent in paired and solo teaching, whether there should be the same mentor for both trainees and exactly how shared teaching should be organised. Some mentors were expressing concern about whether they were implementing the paired placement 'in the correct manner' and it was clear from visiting schools that different mentors had different perceptions of what a paired placement entailed. This ranged from having a totally shared timetable for the two trainees at one end of the spectrum to simply having two trainees in the same department (but no shared teaching) at the other.

Thus it seemed to the group that more guidance was required both for school mentors and also for university tutors who are planning to use paired placements. So the aim of the current project is to produce such guidance, based on the research, for use from September 2011. The group is approaching this task with an open mind, particularly in view of recent research (Bullough, R. et al 2008) which appears to indicate that prescriptive guidance might be counter-productive and that a set of guidelines might be more appropriate. The group identified that a Handbook for Paired Placements had been produced by the East Midlands partnership (for Maths and Science) and this was used to help with planning; it was considered that an integrated web resource using case-studies of schools across the region along with video-clips from the DVD which had been produced earlier, would be most suitable. On-line mentor training and support is being developed by a number of institutions and a web-based handbook of guidance would complement this approach.

Funding of project

This current project has been funded by the Teacher Development Agency with a Recruitment and Retention Challenge Grant (RRCG) of £7000. A copy of the project submission is included in the appendix. The rationale for receiving the grant is that the use of paired placements in school has been shown to improve the retention of trainees on the PGCE ICT course, particularly in the first school placement when trainees can feel isolated if they are on their own. By working in a paired placement the trainees are able to provide support and encouragement to each other. The bid for funding was submitted in December 2009 and in February 2010 we were informed that we had been successful and would receive funding of £7000. The online handbook of guidance should be ready for use by September 2011.

Progress of the project

As can be seen from the list of objectives below there were various stages in this project. Due to various factors it has taken longer to complete the project than anticipated.

Objectives of the project

1. *To produce a literature review to inform the planning of the project.* This was carried out and is summarised in the next section.

2. *To carry out research into perceptions of mentors, trainees, tutors and pupils about paired placements (January – May 2010)*; this was done via questionnaires and interviews. Most of the evidence produced for the research comes from the interviews carried out in the summer in May –June 2010

3. *To produce an online handbook of guidance for university tutors and professional mentors about implementing paired placements for ICT in secondary schools. This will be based on previous and current research*. This has taken rather longer than expected but should be ready for use from September 2011

4. *To improve the quality of the experience of initial placements through pairing and consequently improve the retention of trainees*. The online handbook will be used as an integral part of mentor training as well as for preparing trainees for placement.

RELATED RESEARCH AND LITERATURE

This study draws on research literature concerned with paired placements e.g. Furlough (2006), King (2006), Smith (2004) and Clemitshaw (2003), and highlights areas such as trainee compatibility, imbalance of trainee competency and shared mentoring. A key aim of the study is to develop a practical taxonomy of models of paired placements with a focus on how trainees plan lessons and interact in the classroom.

In order to provide a basis for this research it was necessary to investigate similar studies that have been carried out recently as well as looking at the literature relating to possible models of paired placements. Considerable research has been done into the advantages and disadvantages of paired placements for trainees, schools and pupils but there is less on which models of paired placements are most effective.

Wright D, Newcastle University (2004/5) [reviewed by Judith Broadbridge, NW ICT Tutors]

This study of paired placements in Mathematics adopted the European (Hungarian) model of training and one mentor was responsible for 4 trainees, lessons were given by an expert teacher and analysed and observed by trainees and mentor, trainees taught lessons planned by the whole group and they were then analysed by the other trainees and the mentor. Compared to a single placement there was more team teaching and more observation of and by the mentor. Extra time was provided for the mentor to work with the trainees. Feedback from the trainees was positive but they would have preferred less planning, observation and evaluation once they had become confident in the classroom.

Key issues: mentor having several trainees and spending time on collaborative planning, observation and evaluation

Bullough, R Teacher and Teacher Education (2008) [Reviewed by Richard Vickery, NW ICT tutors]

This is follow up work that was done with 23 secondary social science trainees in the USA (Brigham Young University, Salt Lake City) after studying primary trainees previously. Action research is used and three case studies are documented. Deliberately, no specific guidance was given about tasks and approaches as the focus was on collaborative interaction and the view taken was that mentoring is highly idiosyncratic. Collaboration in planning and teaching was considered separately. Results showed that paired trainees enjoyed a rich learning experience because of the tensions, dialogue and reflections.

Key issues – it may not be necessary to give specific guidance. Action research – 3 case studies

Smith J.D.N. Educational Action Research (2004) [reviewed by Clemitshaw, Sheffield University]

This was a three year study of Maths trainees using the ideas of social constructivism to facilitate learning by trainees. The model of lead and back up teacher model (tandem) was used with alternation of roles. Feedback was restricted to class teacher to avoid potential negative peer feedback. There were good opportunities for out of work collaboration and learning through observing peer in lead role was identified. Issues concerned potential imbalance of competency of trainees, the need for guidance for mentors and trainees and the opportunity to develop whole class responsibilities.

Key issues - role of teaching (lead and back-up), balance of competency and the need for guidance for mentors

Clemitshaw, G Sheffield University (2003/4) [reviewed by Judith Broadbridge, NW ICT tutors]

This is a detailed and comprehensive study involving a cohort of 154 PGCE trainees. Recommendations include ensuring all stakeholders understand what is meant by a paired placement, consideration of compatibility and equality of competence of trainees when creating pairs, valuing collaborative work throughout the training programme, encouragement of joint planning, teaching, peer observation and peer review. Also it appears that some trainees have a greater inclination for collaborative work than others.

Key issues - clarifying expectations of a paired placement (by ITT providers), compatibility (or otherwise) of trainees, peer observation and review

King, S , Institute of Education [reviewed by Richard Vickery, NW ICT tutors]
This is based on a three year study of paired placements for secondary geography trainees. The conclusion is that current practice is not sufficiently understood by all stakeholders. Advice for mentors (from trainees) is provided e.g. be aware that each trainee is an individual and give specific advice, praise or criticism individually.
Key issue - guidance and training is needed for mentors in managing paired placements.

Handbook for Paired Placements,, East Midlands Partnership

This handbook for paired placements has been produced by the East Midlands ITT partnership with TDA funding . It provides a series of documents giving guidance about paired placements. There is a briefing sheet from an ITT provider for schools about paired placements and views of trainees and mentors are given. Literature relating to paired placements is also included.

Key issues - focus is on advantages of paired placements though there is some useful guidance also

Sheffield Hallam web-site on Paired Placements

Work has been done at Sheffield Hallam University to produce a web-site providing guidance into models of types of teaching for paired placements (tandem, team and co-coaching) with video-clips (and transcripts) illustrating each. It is located at http://academic.shu.ac.uk/ds/eldt/pair/lid8.html

Key issues – the three types of teaching are explained well with example of each. A very useful resource.

Conclusions from the literature review
It is apparent from the literature that there is a lack of clarity amongst school mentors (and maybe ITT providers) about what is meant by a paired placement and so it is incumbent on the ITT provider to clarify this and to give the mentors some broad parameters to work around. The proposal to provide an online handbook appears to be a sound one based on the research findings and the paper-based handbook from the East Midlands group gives us a starting point.

What is also clear is that there is a lot of evidence now which shows the benefits of paired placements to all involved and in a sense 'that battle has been won'. It also appears that more schools are seeing the benefits but are asking for guidance.

Most research studies have both a quantitative and qualitative element in them but the latter (in the form of interviews and case-studies) appear to be the most useful. Thus it would seem best to concentrate our own project on obtaining qualitative evidence so guidance can be provided.

TAXONOMY OF MODELS

As a result of the literature review and discussions amongst members of the group it was decided that a method of classifying the type of paired placement would be helpful in the analysis of the research study. Some work has already been done on the type of shared teaching that can be done; for example the Sheffield Hallam study (see above) uses the three categories of team, tandem and co-coaching . There are other factors to consider such as collaborative planning and whether there is a shared mentor and so the following taxonomy was devised.

There are three criteria as shown in the table below. Firstly there is a measure of the amount of teaching time which is shared teaching, ranging from none (independent) to shared (the majority of classes are shared) with a category in between (semi-independent).

Secondly there is a measure of the amount of collaboration in planning and producing resources. This is separate from the first criteria because there are situations where two trainees will be teaching similar classes independently (e.g. two year 7 discrete ICT classes) but will be teaching the same topic and so will plan and produce resources together. Similarly the two trainees may be sharing a class but will plan and produce resources independently. So the categories range from solo to semi-collaborative to fully collaborative.

The final measure is whether the trainees share a mentor or whether they each have a separate mentor. With the first category there is also the question of whether all the meetings are shared or whether the mentor also spends some time individually with each trainee.

CRITERIA	CATEGORY
In the classroom/teaching	Independent
	Semi-independent (*)
	Shared (*)
Planning and producing resources	Solo
	Semi-collaborative
	Collaborative
Mentor	Individual
	Shared(**)

*Within this category there are the three types identified by the SHU study

Team	Trainees share the teaching on an equal basis and team teach.
Tandem	One trainee is the lead teacher and the other trainee acts a teaching assistant
Co-coaching	One trainee is the lead teacher and the other trainee observes, reflects and gives feedback

** Within this category there needs to be an indication of whether mentor meetings are shared or whether the mentor also gives individual feedback to each trainee on occasions.

METHODOLOGY

The study involves 30 trainee ICT teachers and their school mentors from four universities providing ITT in the North West of England. It adopts a predominantly qualitative approach supplemented by quantitative data. Data collection involves survey questionnaires and semi-structured interviews and takes place at the start and end of the placement. For the interviews and case-studies each institution focused on two partnership schools. The data collection was completed in 2009/10 and the analysis and conclusions will be available by September 2011.

According to Verma and Mallick cited by Burton & Bartlett (2005:16) there are four types of research: pure research, applied or field research, action research and evaluative research. This project is a combination of the latter two. As the project itself was funded by the TDA, who have approved the original aims and objectives and require evaluative reports and dissemination of the results, the work being done is evaluative research and involves producing progress reports. However, in addition this project is also part of a much wider action research into how trainees can be supported whilst on placement away from the university. Thus the work is '*continuous and cyclica*l' (Burton & Bartlett 2005:17).

By taking the practical and ethical issues involved in this evaluation into consideration a case-study approach was deemed most appropriate, thereby employing 'a strategy where the researcher aims to study one case in depth' (Burton & Bartlett 2005:85). It is accepted though that case-studies can be criticised for their lack of generalisability, as they usually involve a small number of participants who may not be representative of the wider population. But this is counter-balanced by the detailed data they can yield. Bassey (1990) cited by Burton and Bartlett (2005:86) suggests that '*although each case is unique, there are sufficient similarities to make the findings from one case study useful when seeking to understand others'.* By taking into account the perspectives of those at the heart of the learning the process, i.e. the trainee teachers and their school mentors, the methodology is based on a social-constructivist approach to learning (Vigotsky, 1978). Accordingly trainees' learning takes place together through discussion and support and is also closely related to the notions of learning communities (Wenger, 1998).

Sample for the study

Specifically, this report is based on the experiences of ICT trainees at the four institutions who were on the course during 2009/10 and the project aims to investigate the experience of paired placements of PGCE ICT trainees and their mentors.

Data Collection

Data collection took place at each of the four institutions which identified partner schools where multiple placements are being used with PGCE ICT trainees. Initially all the trainees and mentors were asked to complete a questionnaire about their views on paired placements. Before the placement the university tutor discussed the paired placement and showed the trainees part of the DVD so they were familiar with the perceived advantages and disadvantages of this type of placement. At the end of the placement the trainees and mentors were then asked to complete a similar questionnaire and this was followed up by semi-structured interviews of a sample of 4 paired placements (1 schools per institution). Questionnaires and interview sheets are included in the appendices.

Data Analysis of interviews

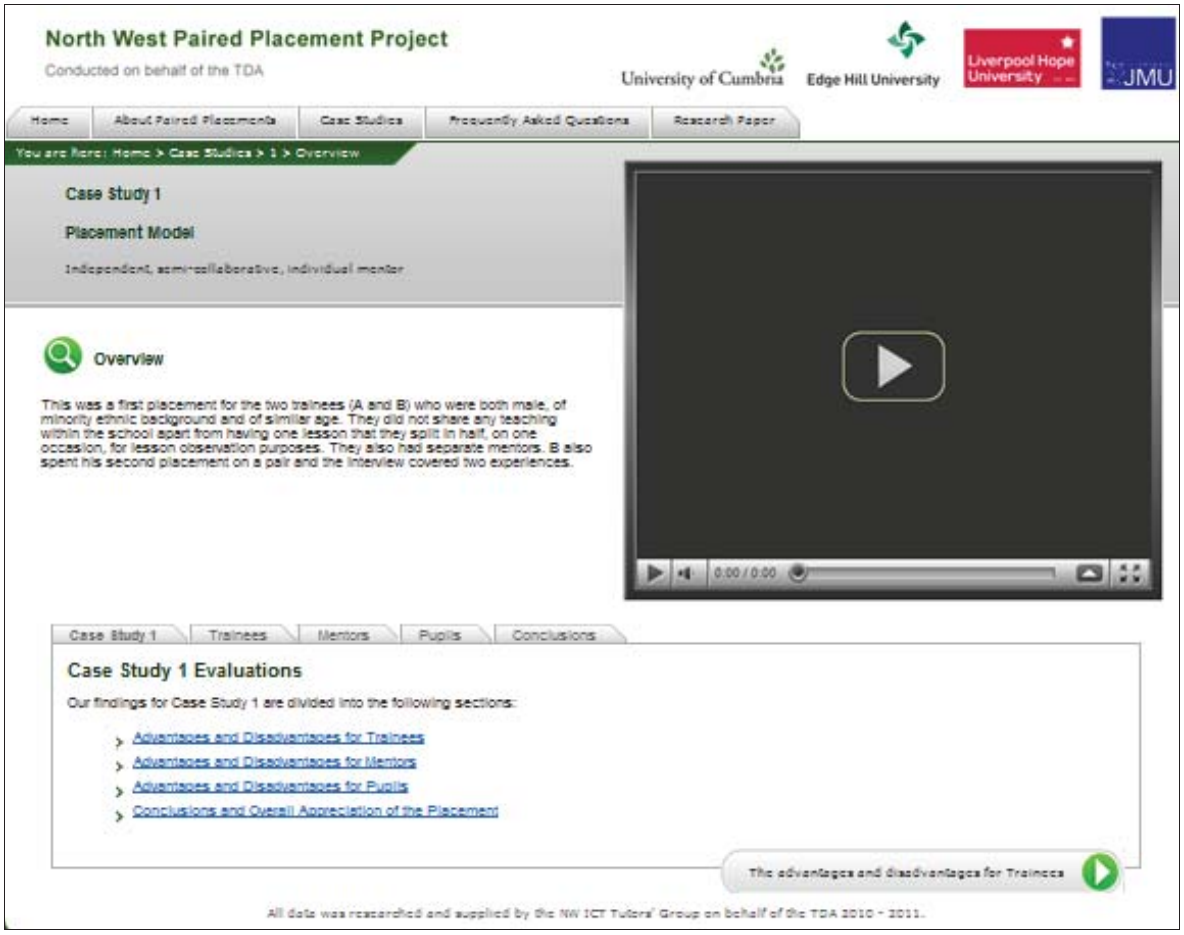
The semi-structured interviews were conducted in June 2011 and audio recordings were made. These were then transcribed and analysed by Judith Broadbridge (a member of the team and a former PLA with the TDA). The analyses are included in the appendices. Each of the case-studies was categorised using the taxonomy (above) and it can be seen that there is a variety of different types.

Case Study	Teaching	Planning and Resources	Mentor	Type of teaching	Type of mentoring
1	Independent	Semi-collaborative	Individual	N/A	N/A
2	Independent	Semi-collaborative	Shared		
3	Semi-Independent	Collaborative	Shared	Tandem (Lead and TA)	
4	Shared	Semi-collaborative	Shared	Team and tandem	

Online Handbook

The format of the handbook was discussed and decided by the NW ICT Tutors' Group and was produced using the material from the research study, literature review and evaluation of the DVD. This was done professionally and details of the web-site are given in the appendix.. An example screen is shown below.

http://www.orbis-interactive.com/pairedPlacement/index.php



Issues sheets

Following analysis of the case-studies, a set of issues sheets were produced to provide a focus for discussion between mentors, trainees and university staff. These are included in the appendix.

CASE STUDY FINDINGS

Case-Study 1

This was a paired first placement with little shared teaching (just one lesson a week) and separate mentors. The trainees mentioned that the mentors compared them (sometimes unflatteringly) and that the mentors had different expectations. One trainee also implied that the other trainee could have been more cooperative. In many ways this appears to have been an unsuccessful paired placement and illustrates that without guidance (from the training institution) having two trainees could impact on the quality of the placement and the mentoring process. Thus there would seem to be a need for a clear briefing of both the trainees and the mentor.

[on the DVD there is a video of a university mentor briefing two trainees before they start on a paired placement and this can provide guidance for ITT tutors]

Case-study 2

This was a paired final placement of two mature trainees who had had experience of previous paired placements and were thus comfortable with the arrangement (to the extend it was almost normal practice). They had contrasting personalities but were able to complement each other and shared subject knowledge and discussed progress. They did not share any classes but taught similar topics and were able to compare ideas. It appears that they were keen to work reasonably independently compared to previous placements where they had worked together on a scheme of work. This might reinforce the view that paired placements involving shared teaching are more helpful in the first rather than later placements . The trainees shared a mentor and both mentioned that they would have preferred more individual time with the mentor.

[on the DVD there is an interesting clip of two trainees discussing paired placements in the first placement]

Case-study 3

This was a paired first placement and was the most successful of the four case-studies in that the trainees shared their teaching using the tandem model (lead teacher and TA) and were also able to have more contact time with pupils due to this arrangement. Planning was shared though one trainee mentioned that he would have preferred to personalise the resources and plans at times rather than having the shared approach all the time. The trainees had been prepared for the placement and appeared to be personally compatible and enjoyed working together. There was some peer observation (coach model) and pupils generally appeared to benefit unless the class was small when the large number of adults was rather overwhelming. The trainees commented that they felt confident to start teaching earlier than they would have done if they were on their own because of the support provided by the pairing.

[on the DVD an example is given of how trainees can experience teaching earlier and plan together]

Case-Study 4

This was a paired final placement of two trainees who were different in terms of personality, age and confidence in the classroom and so initially had problems but with time appreciated some of the benefits professionally of having to work together and share ideas. The mentor appears to be very committed to the paired placement and the impression is given that she worked hard to make it work and was very positive. She does acknowledge that the trainees need solo teaching especially in this final placement and that she needs to provide time for individual discussion with the trainees. The mentor also mentions that she felt she benefitted professionally by having two trainees with whom she could have discussions about current and future practice,

CONCLUSIONS

The four case-studies illustrate the different experiences of paired placements and they illustrate many of the issues which need to be addressed by schools and teacher training institutions when arranging and implementing paired placements. Based on this (admittedly small) sample the following conclusions can be made and these will form the basis of the guidance provided in the online resource.

1. As an important part of training to be a teacher is to show that the trainee has a "commitment to collaboration and co-operative working with colleagues" (QTS Standard Q6), it is necessary that the paired placement is put into this context to emphasise that one of the roles of a teacher is to work together with other professionals for the benefit of the pupils. The paired placement gives the ideal opportunity to develop these skills. However it is apparent that the trainees need to be briefed beforehand about what is expected and that they will need to collaborate and cooperate and follow the guidance of their school mentor(s).

As part of the normal briefing of trainees before placement (by the teacher training institution) the practice of paired placements needs to be fully explained.

2. Equally important is the role of the mentor(s) in a paired placement. Whilst some degree of latitude may be provided in how the mentor(s) interpret their role it is important that the mentor(s) understand that there should be some shared planning and teaching (the exact amount to be negotiated) and that one trainee should take the role of the teaching assistant when the other trainee is leading the lesson. This will provide evidence for meeting the standards and will also benefit the pupils who will have two teachers to help them rather than one.

As part of the normal mentor training provided by the teacher training institution (either face to face or virtual) mentors should be briefed about the general expectations of a paired placement and their role in facilitating it.

3. In general it appears that in terms of providing a consistent and fair approach it is better if the two trainees have the same mentor. This does mean however that as well as having joint meetings with the trainees there will be times when the mentor will have individual discussions (and formal meetings) with each trainee on their own. The trainees in this study have made this clear that this is important. This does put further pressure on the mentor and this does need to be recognised both in the mentor training and in the time provided in school. This confirms the findings by Wright (2004) that extra time needs to be provided for the mentor in a paired placement.

If possible both trainees on a paired placement should have the same mentor to ensure consistency. Time needs to be made available for the mentor to meet individually with each trainee as well as having shared meetings.

4. It is important that each trainee on a paired placement develops his or her own style of teaching and planning and so as well as sharing teaching of some classes they do need to have experience of working on their own with some classes. This appears to be more important in final placements rather than the first placement as the trainees are then developing their own teaching persona and need to find what styles works for them and with which they are most comfortable.

As part of the paired placement trainees need to have the opportunity to plan and teach individually and develop their own teaching personality in the classroom.

5. It is clear that trainees can benefit from observing and being observed by the other trainee in the pair. This can help their own reflection and provide non-threatening feedback. There does however need to be a good level of trust between the trainees and guidance could be provided for them alongside that given at present for observing experienced teachers in school which is often provided at the start of the course. It is important that this peer observation and feedback does need to be done sensitively to avoid the risk of negative peer feedback identified by Smith (2004).

Trainees should be encouraged (with guidance from the mentor) to observe the other trainee teaching and feed back their observations as part of the normal group discussion with the mentor.

6. It does appear (as noted by Clemitshaw, 2003/4) that some trainees have a greater inclination for collaborative work than others and that whilst it might be appropriate to insist on a pairing for the first placement this may not necessarily be appropriate for the final placement. Trainees need to be consulted when deciding on whether pairing is to be used and who is to be paired with whom.

Trainees' views should be taken into account when deciding on the composition of pairs for the final placement. Trainees (and mentors) will need further briefing about how pairing might be organized in this type of placement.

7. Finally even though it is clear that mentoring is idiosyncratic (as stated by Bullough, 2008) it is evident from this study and in these contexts that some guidance is needed for mentors in order for the placement to be successful. Otherwise this can lead to the problems identified in case-study one.

This study has reinforced the need for guidance for mentors on paired placements in order for the benefits of this type of placement to be realised.

SUMMARY (WHAT NEXT?)

The online guide is in the process of being completed and should be ready in September 2011. It will be available for use in mentor training sessions and for briefing trainees. In addition it is a resource that school mentors can use in their own time to obtain guidance about how to organise paired placements. At some stage it will be useful to evaluate its usefulness.

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APPENDICES

NW ICt Tutors' RRCG Application.docx

Initial Questionnaire (trainees)v4.doc

Initial Questionnaire (mentors).docx

Final Questionnaire (trainees)v4.doc

Final Questionnaire (mentors) v3.doc

interview schedule.doc

Case Study 1.docx

Case Study 2.docx

Case Study 3.docx

Case Study 4.docx

Issues Sheet 1 (Case Study 1).docx

Issues Sheet 2 (Case Study 3).doc

Issues Sheet 3 (Case Study 4).doc

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