

## **Improving workplace learning of lifelong learning sector trainee teachers in the UK**

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## **Improving workplace learning of lifelong learning sector trainee teachers in the UK**

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### **Abstract**

Learning in the teaching workplace is crucial for the development of all trainee teachers. Workplace learning is particularly important for trainee teachers in the lifelong learning sector (LLS) in the UK, the majority of whom are already working as teachers, tutors, trainers or lecturers while undertaking initial teacher education. However, literature indicates that LLS workplace conditions often inhibit teacher learning. This paper reviews the research base on LLS trainees' workplace learning. Billett's (2008) concept of relational interdependence, between the affordances (activities and interactions) that workplaces offer for learning and the ways in which individuals perceive and engage with these, is used as a framework to synthesise research evidence. Support and experience of teaching were found to be crucial affordances for trainees' learning. The nature and availability of these affordances were shaped by workplace culture, organisational strategy, process and structures and the allocation and structuring of work. The ways in which trainees perceived and interacted with workplace affordances for learning were influenced by their prior experiences, confidence and self-esteem, career intentions, workplace position and status and orientation toward theoretical tools. The key properties of support and teaching experience and the workplace conditions needed to promote trainees' learning are proposed. These provide a starting point for employers, mentors, teacher educators, policy makers and trainees to improve workplace learning. The findings and proposals are also relevant to HE and school initial teacher education. Proposals are made for addressing the gaps in the scale and scope of research into LLS trainees' workplace learning.

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**Keywords:** workplace learning; initial teacher education; lifelong learning; FE; professional development; teacher training; post compulsory education; trainee teachers.

## **Introduction**

The lifelong learning sector (LLS) in the UK is large and diverse. For example, in England the sector comprises:

‘244 general FE [Further Education] colleges, 94 sixth form colleges, 15 specialist designated institutions...., over 1,000 private or charitable training providers, over 200 public bodies such as local authorities offering adult community learning, 38 higher education institutions which also offer FE courses, 18 National Skills Academies, training departments of major employers....., 14 NHS [National Health Service] Trusts, government departments...., the armed services and government agencies like the Prison Service’. (Lingfield 2012, 18)

The comparative size of the LLS in the other home nations may be seen by contrasting the 341 FE colleges in England in April 2013, with 36 in Scotland, 19 in Wales and 6 in Northern Ireland (AoC, 2013). Lingard (2012) estimates that there are over 200,000 teachers in the LLS in England, however reliable datasets of all UK LLS teachers do not exist. As a consequence of the scale and complexity of the sector, teaching roles, often described as tutor, trainer or lecturer, are diverse and there is variation in employment contracts and conditions.

The vast majority of new LLS teachers undertake initial teacher education (ITE) on a part-time in-service basis after gaining teaching employment on programmes that usually require course attendance, at an FE or Higher Education(HE) institution, half or one day a week over a period of up to two years. There is no reliable estimate of number of UK LLS trainee teachers, however a significant scale of participation is indicated by 41,487 employees in

English FE colleges who were undertaking an initial teacher training qualification in 2010 (LSIS, 2012). Although the statutory regulations for qualifications for LLS ITE in the home nation vary<sup>1</sup>, the workplace, for all in-service trainees, is a crucial site for learning and development. Much of the ITE curriculum is related to the trainee's workplace - trainees develop and reflect on their practice, ITE tutors observe their teaching and there is a requirement for workplace mentor support. The trainee's workplace is also a site for formal and informal learning beyond their ITE programme. However, despite the importance of LLS trainees' workplace learning it is a largely neglected research area (Lucas and Unwin 2009).

The wider workplace learning literature indicates considerable variation between workplaces in the extent to which they support learning (for example: Eraut 2007; Fuller and Unwin 2003). This is of particular concern in the LLS sector where there is a growing body of evidence that workplace conditions inhibit the learning and development of teachers at all stages in their careers (Bathmaker and Avis 2005; Jephcote, Salisbury and Rees 2008). It is therefore timely to review and synthesise current understandings of LLS trainees' workplace learning, and explore ways in which it may be improved.

This paper outlines the methodological approach taken to reviewing research on LLS in-service trainees' workplace learning and summarises the scope and scale of the research base. Drawing on Billett's (2008) concept of relational interdependence as an organising framework the research base and key themes from wider workplace learning literature are synthesised to address the following questions:

- What supports and what inhibits LLS in-service trainees' learning in the workplace?
- How can in-service trainees' workplace learning be improved?
- What further research on LLS trainees' workplace learning is needed?

While the paper focuses on the LLS the discussion has relevance to trainee teachers' workplace learning in schools and higher education. It is particularly pertinent in relation to policy changes in England which give greater responsibility to schools for providing ITE (DfE 2010).

## **Review of LLS trainees' workplace learning research**

### ***Methodology***

A literature review was conducted to identify the in-service LLS trainees' workplace learning research evidence base. The approach was guided by the principles for undertaking systematic literature reviews set out by Evans and Benefield (2001), particularly clear specification of research questions, systematic and exhaustive searching for studies, clear criteria for including and excluding studies and methodological transparency. Papers were identified using a key word search of the British Education Index, the Australian education index, ERIC and Education Line for the last 10 years. This was supplemented by searching the contents lists for the last five years of relevant academic journals related to the LLS sector and to teacher education, and retrieving related academic and professional references identified in the articles found in the systematic search. Articles selected were those that illuminated trainees' workplace learning, either as the prime research focus or as a substantial part of a broader study. Studies of pre-service trainees, who undertake placements, were not included as these represent a different set of workplace relationships and processes to those experienced by in-service trainees. Studies that focused primarily on the taught elements of ITE programmes were also excluded.

The methodological approach diverged from systematic review procedures in the assessment and selection of papers, aligning more closely with Evans and Benefield's (2001) description of a narrative or academic review. Given the early stage of research in the field there was little to be gained from applying selection criteria more appropriate to established research areas with larger bodies of work and larger scale studies. The criterion for the inclusion of studies in this review was therefore that there was a clear and substantiated link between theoretical and/or empirical evidence and the claims made about trainees' workplace learning.

### ***Research base***

Adhering to the criteria set out above eleven papers (Table 1) substantially related to in-service LLS trainees' workplace learning were found. Since the predominant mode of LLS ITE outside the UK is pre-service, it is not surprising that all the articles related to the UK context. Ten related to the England and one to Scotland.

There are important shortcomings with the body of research undertaken to date. As Table 1 illustrates, it is limited in both scope and scale - few studies met the search criteria. This reflects the neglect, until recently, of any research into LLS trainee learning and more particularly of trainees' workplace learning. Furthermore, the research is dominated by trainee perspectives, supplemented less often by accounts from teacher educators or HR managers, and even fewer accounts from trainees' line managers, departmental colleagues or senior leaders. This has resulted in an evidence base that lacks the primary data needed to explore the workplaces cultures, structures, practices and power relationships that are integral to trainees' experiences and relationships. The research has predominantly been undertaken in FE colleges and the vast majority of trainee research participants were undertaking ITE

provided by a HE institution or one of its partners. This omits the diversity of settings in the LLS sector and trainees who undertake Awarding Body ITE qualifications.

There are inherent difficulties in researching workplace learning because much workplace learning is informal and taken for granted, the knowledge developed is often tacit and:

‘learning is dominated by codified, propositional knowledge, so respondents often find it difficult to describe more complex aspects of their work and the nature of their expertise’ (Eraut 2004, 249).

Orr and Simmons (2010, 80) emphasize the difficulties arising from the ‘frenetic nature of FE colleges’ that leads to ‘respondents simply not noticing what they considered normal in their practice or situation’. A range of methodological approaches have been deployed in LLS trainees’ workplace learning research to attempt to address some of these difficulties. For example, Thompson (2010) adopted an ethnographic approach and Maxwell (2009) used situated instances of practice, including researcher’ observations of the trainee’s teaching as a discursive tool in interviews.

**[Table 1. about here]**

Despite the limitations in the LLS trainee workplace learning research base, it is timely to draw out emergent themes as a basis for synthesising current understandings of the factors that impinge on trainees’ workplace learning and explore how trainees’ workplace learning can be improved. The next section sets out a conceptual framework for organising the synthesis.

### **Workplace learning - conceptual framework**

The substantive body of workplace learning theory that has emerged over the last two decades is underpinned by the assumption that learning is constructed through participation in

social interactions. Through participation, individuals ‘shape and transform both themselves and the social/ interactional environments within which they work’ (Lee et al. 2004, 9).

Within this conceptualisation of learning, different positions have been taken on nature of the relationship between the individual and their social context. In this paper the concept of relational interdependence (Billett, 2008) is used as a framework for synthesising the LLS trainees’ workplace learning research base and developing proposals for improvement. While this framework may be criticised for over privileging individual agency, it has the explanatory power to examine the individual, social and structural aspects of trainees’ learning.

Billett (2008) conceptualised workplace learning as emerging from the relational interdependence of the dual bases for participation – the affordances for learning (i.e. the opportunities for participation in activities and interactions) a workplace offers and how individuals choose to participate in those affordances. Affordances for learning are culturally and historically constructed from workplace values, norms and practices, and therefore vary both within and between organisations (Billett et al. 2004). For example, a college department may offer the affordance of frequent interactions with colleagues to problem solve practice issues, whereas a tutor in a community setting may not have this opportunity.

Billett et al. (2004) argue that individual agency is socially constructed through personal histories and that:

‘individuals’ subjective dispositions shape and direct their thinking and acting, including how they construe and construct the experience (i.e., what they learn)’ (Billett 2010, 2).



Individual dispositions ‘develop and evolve through the experiences and interactions within the learner’s life course’ (Hodkinson and Hodkinson 2003, 5) and are largely tacit and ‘embodied, involving emotions and practice, as well as thoughts’ (Hodkinson and Hodkinson 2005, 118). Thus, trainees’ subjective dispositions influence the ways in which they perceive and engage in the workplace and, in turn, are reshaped through workplace experiences.

While Billett’s model of relational interdependence focuses primarily on the individual and the workplace both are understood to be shaped by the wider system and socio-political and cultural norms, practice and values.

The next section uses the concept of relational interdependence as a framework to synthesise key themes from the LLS trainees’ workplace learning research base – focusing on the individual factors that affect trainees’ engagement with workplace affordances, the workplace affordances that support trainee learning and their availability in LLS settings, the influence of workplace characteristics on the nature of workplace affordances, the wider system factors that shape workplace conditions and the interrelationships between individual, workplace and wider system factors.

### **Factors affecting trainees’ workplace learning**

The purpose of this section is to synthesise findings from studies of LLS trainees’ workplace learning as a basis for proposing, in the following section, how trainee learning may be improved. Gaps in the current empirical base are also identified. To deepen the discussion emergent themes are discussed with reference to the wider workplace learning literature base.

#### ***Individual factors***

On entry to LLS teaching trainees vary in age, career stage and prior life, education and work experiences and so bring to the workplace diverse sets of subjective dispositions towards

work and learning. Research evidence shows that prior experiences as a learner, prior vocational experience, vocational identity and life experiences significantly influence workplace engagement. Maxwell (2010b) gives examples of trainees' making decisions about teaching approaches based on emotional memories of negative experiences as learners, as well as 'copying' their own teachers and applying knowledge and skills gained in prior academic or vocational studies. Trainees construct strong vocational identities prior to entering the LLS which in some cases limit trainees' willingness to engage with colleagues who have less vocational expertise than themselves but a deeper understanding of pedagogy (Maxwell 2010b).

Entry to LLS teaching is often unplanned:

'many FE practitioners begin their careers in FE with no formal training or background in teaching. Many never envisaged 'professional' careers, let alone in teaching, and some 'slipped' into the role through a range of unforeseen and unplanned events' (Gleeson and James, 2007, 454).

and takes place through the 'long interview' (454) of building from casual hours to a full-time post (Thompson 2010). However, LLS trainees' career intentions and how their individual personalities and circumstances influence decisions to stay or leave during training and the early years of their LLS career is under researched. This is important as a trainee's orientation towards their career is likely to have a significant influence on their orientation to work and workplace learning. Similarly, a trainee's position and status in relation to the workplace, such as full or part-time and on a permanent contract, temporary contract or

employed through an agency is central to their identity (Finlay 2008) and consequently their perception of, and engagement in, the workplace.

LLS trainee work based learning studies illuminate ways in which trainees' conceptions, practices, confidence and identities, and consequently dispositions, develop through workplace participation. Trainees adopt a productive worker rather than trainee identity. This identity is expected by their colleagues and trainees feel obliged to respond to these expectations (Lucas and Unwin 2009; Orr and Simmons 2010) Trainees ally themselves with the LLS 'story', accepting that there is little their organisation can do to support them:

'Interviewees spoke of how there was very little their colleges could do to improve matters due to the daily pressures to put teachers in front of students, inadequate funding to recruit extra teachers, and the general problems faced by their managers' (Lucas and Unwin 2009, 429).

This is concerning as it can lead to trainees not seeking out affordances for learning or choosing not to engage in affordances that may place additional demands on already overworked colleagues and managers.

Finlay (2008) found that a significant minority of trainees lacked confidence and self-esteem or doubted their teaching ability. Increased workplace experience, particularly positive feedback from learners, builds trainees confidence and in turn encourages them to try new teaching approaches, enabling trainees to engage more fully with workplace affordances for learning (Maxwell 2010a). However, caution is needed in conflating increased confidence with learning to teach - trainees may only be developing confidence in coping with the LLS

context and increased confidence may lead to trainees rationalising limited teaching approaches (Orr 2012).

While trainees' conceptions of learning and teaching are significantly shaped by their prior experiences, over the initial training period there is broadly a progression to more multi-dimensional conceptions of teaching and learning, greater recognition of learners' needs and adoption of more student centred approaches (Maxwell 2009). However, despite this progression there is a growing body of evidence that points to trainees developing limited instrumental technicised discourses of teaching and learning and focusing on completing paperwork rather than pedagogy (Orr and Simmons 2010). Such orientations are concerning as they limit the depth of trainees' engagement in workplace affordances for learning. This may be further compounded by trainees' ambivalence towards theory (Harkin 2005). Finlay (2008) provides evidence of trainees using tools from their ITE programme, such as theoretical frameworks, models of reflection and keeping learning journals, to support workplace learning, the acquisition of new teaching strategies and the development of identity and self-esteem. Drawing on Engeström's (2001) theory of expansive learning, Finlay (2008, 78) argues that 'it is difficult, conflicted or paradoxical situations that offer the most potential for learning' and it is in these situations that conceptual and theoretical tools are of more use than other forms of support. However, if as Harkin, Clow and Hillier (2003), Maxwell (2010a) and Orr and Simmons (2010) found trainees eschew the use of theoretical tools, potential opportunities for learning through workplace activity are missed.

In summary, trainees' prior experiences of learning, work and life, levels of confidence and self-esteem, career intentions, workplace position and status, and orientation towards theoretical tools become embodied in trainees' dispositions. When these dispositions are

brought to bear in the LLS workplace they open up some possibilities for learning but close down others. Trainees' dispositions towards workplace affordances evolve through workplace participation. Trainees adoption of productive worker identities and a reluctance to use theoretical tools in the workplace, limit their engagement with workplace affordances for learning.

The preceding discussion indicates a high degree of interrelationship between individual and workplace factors in determining trainees' learning. Workplace factors are explored in the next section.

### ***Workplace factors***

#### *Workplace affordances for learning: support and experience*

Aligning with the wider workplace literature, it is evident from the studies of LLS trainees' workplace learning that two workplace affordances for learning are crucial –support and experience of teaching. However, the lack of formal **support** for LLS trainees in the workplace, particularly from those tasked with providing support – their line managers and workplace mentors, is a striking and consistent research finding ( for example, Lucas and Unwin 2009; Orr 2012). There is some contrary evidence of successful mentoring in relation to the three key areas of induction – the organisation, the subject and the teaching profession, when mentors are passionate about teaching, challenge trainees and have high expectations (Tedder and Lawry 2009). Likewise, the English inspectorate chart an improving position with regard to the allocation of mentors to all trainees. However, effective mentor support is not widespread and English inspections continue to draw attention to a lack of consistency in the quality of mentoring. Lucas and Unwin's (2009) finding that while most trainees had a mentor they had little contact with them is echoed across most studies. LLS ITE policy has steered towards a judgemental rather than developmental approach to mentoring. This limits

the potential for transformative learning (Cullimore and Simmons 2009; Tedder and Lawry 2009).

While formal support is often illusive, there is evidence of supportive informal relationships stimulating learning (Finlay 2008; Lucas and Unwin 2009; Maxwell 2010b). However, this is only possible where trainees are not isolated from their colleagues, either as a result of the geographical location of their teaching or their part-time status.

Overall, these studies suggest that some trainees have restricted access to support and so are denied opportunities to gain feedback on their practices and co-construct knowledge with colleagues. They may also miss out on emotional support– which has been shown to be crucial in early career school teacher development:

‘there is little option but to enter life as a teacher through a kind of emotional labour that is in effect an investment in the formation of relationships that are fundamental to the beginner’s sense of development as a teacher’ (McNally et al. 2008, 289).

There is surprisingly little research on the ways in which LLS trainees learn through the *experience* of teaching. This is a worrying omission since planning, facilitating, assessing and evaluating learning are key processes in recontextualising knowledge from trainees’ previous experiences and ITE programme into practice knowledge (Lucas 2007). The limited evidence available indicates that trainees perceive the experience of teaching, and crucially the interactions with learners, to be the most significant workplace affordance for learning (Maxwell 2010b). Trainees, in Maxwell’s study, constructed knowledge through participatory practices with learners, sometimes in a planned way - for example, seeking feedback from learners on something they had tried out, and sometimes in an unplanned way from an intuitive recognition that something wasn’t working and adapting to address this:

‘A distinct dynamic area of knowing was constructed within the learner–tutor relationship. This differed from generic knowledge of learning and teaching processes in being bound to, and created with and about, individual learners and specific learner groups.’ (343)

Trainees in the same and a further study (Maxwell 2010a, 2010b) described learning through pragmatic ‘trial and error’ and through reflection on action (Schön 1983), although they did not label it reflection. The trainees explained how immersion in practice led to a better understanding of learners and linked this to developments in their conceptions of learning and teaching and practices. Maxwell’s studies and Finlay’s (2008) description of how trainees developed by applying tools from their ITE course in their teaching demonstrates the potential of teaching experience as an affordance for learning. However, as the inspectorate repeatedly highlight, many trainees only have access to a limited range of teaching experiences. This is particularly problematic outside FE colleges and even in some colleges trainees may only teach one type of learner group or at one level. Experiencing a range of teaching is important as Maxwell (2009, 474) found trainees ‘faced with the different social dynamics of a new teaching context ....adopted less sophisticated conceptions and practices’ than in their established teaching context.

*The influence of workplace characteristics on the availability and quality of trainee support and teaching experience*

Evidence from the LLS and wider workplace learning literature indicates that the availability and quality of the affordances for learning of support and teaching experience are strongly determined by workplace culture, organisational strategy, processes and structure and the allocation and structuring of work.

Wider literature evidences the economically driven performative and managerialist *culture* prevalent across the LLS (for example: Steer et al. 2007; Jephcote, Salisbury and Rees 2008). The limitations this places on learning is evident in most studies of trainees' workplace learning and is recognised by some trainees as a barrier to their development (Finlay 2008). Staff perceive that the funding regime imposes a culture of busyness and overwork. Within this culture it difficult for staff to support trainees and, as discussed earlier, trainees do not ask for support leading to trainee isolation (Lucas and Unwin 2009; Orr 2012). Furthermore, managerialism can undermine the affordance of communicative and collegial interactions (The Literacy Study Group 2010).

A further aspect of the wider LLS culture embodied in individual organisations is the lack of a tradition of professional development, particularly in relation to pedagogy. Vocational expertise has traditionally been valued more highly than pedagogic expertise, which supports a culture where more experienced teachers do not routinely engage in activities designed to help trainees learn how to teach (Orr and Simmons 2010). This is further exacerbated in LLS settings, such as the former Entry to Employment programme, where the high turnover of staff leads to a lack of 'participative' memory of professional development and a valuing of professional qualities and experience over professional knowledge (Thompson 2010).

Culture at departmental or workgroup level also determines the experiences and support available to trainees. Drawing on Fuller and Unwin's (2003) conceptualisation of an expansive - restrictive learning environment continuum, Hodkinson and Hodkinson (2005) found that different departments within the same school were positioned at different points on the continuum. This variation is echoed in the LLS, where Lucas and Unwin (2009) found that some departments created opportunities for time to share professional learning - a feature



of an expansive learning environment- even when the overall college learning environment was restrictive.

Two aspects of *organisational strategy, processes and structure* have been found to impinge strongly on trainee experiences and support and ultimately learning: whether or not there is a supportive institutional ‘architecture’ for mentoring; and in FE colleges - the relationship between workforce development functions and initial teacher training.

Weaknesses in mentor support emanate in part from practical issues, such as lack of allocated time for mentoring and weaknesses in the infrastructure, such as availability of appropriate physical spaces for mentor meetings (Cullimore and Simmons 2010). Key aspects of an effective architecture for mentoring, identified by Cunningham (2007), include an institutional commitment to mentoring, integration of mentoring into the organisation’s people development strategy, allocation of physical resources such as private rooms for meetings, resources that exemplify effective teaching practice, an appropriate mentor selection policy, a programme of induction training, support for mentors and a collegially agreed framework that sets out mentors’ and mentees’ roles and obligations.

In some FE colleges ITE is ‘very much conceived of and practiced as a tightly bounded process that is completely separate from colleges’ continuing professional development (CPD) programmes or workforce development provision more generally’ (Lucas and Unwin, 2009 431). This leads to a lack of recognition of the needs of trainees and marginalises them from college workforce development strategies and processes, restricting their opportunities to engage in workplace affordances for learning.

The effect of *the allocation and structuring of work* on trainees in LLS organisations has not been a research focus. However, evidence from early professional workplace learning literature, including school teacher learning, indicates that it is crucial in determining whether trainees engage in individual or collaborative activity, and the extent and quality of their opportunities to meet, observe and work with more experienced colleagues and develop relationships that provide support and feedback (Eraut 2004). The allocation and structuring of work also determines whether trainees are able to gain sufficient practice of key tasks and functions to achieve competence. Where work is organised so that trainees are allocated difficult classes and given too many responsibilities they are set up for failure (McCormack, Gore and Thomas 2006). Trainees need both challenge and support to develop, but the degree of challenge must be appropriate:

For novice professionals, ... a significant proportion of their work needs to be sufficiently new to challenge them without being so daunting as to reduce their confidence; and their workload needs to be at a level that allows them to reflectively respond to new challenges, rather than develop coping mechanisms that might later prove to be ineffective.' (Eraut 2004, 270)

Some LLS trainees are not given remission from teaching to attend training or undertake coursework. Combined with heavy workloads, this can lead to trainees feeling overwhelmed and undermine their confidence. Trainees may learn to cope but this does not necessarily mean that they progressing beyond limited understandings of teaching (Orr 2012).

Further aspects of the organisation of work that impinges on trainee learning are organisational routines and paperwork. While, as highlighted earlier, trainees report constructing knowledge of practice from engagement in routine processes and document

completion (Maxwell 2010b), the excessive paperwork demands in some LLS organisations leads trainees into a pragmatic approach, where completing ‘the paperwork’ has higher priority than developing pedagogy. As a consequence trainees may develop restricted technist understandings of, and approaches to, practice (Orr and Simmons 2010).

In summary, the research base suggests that trainees often experience restricted access to the two crucial workplace affordances for learning - support and teaching experience. These restrictions emanate from a number of interrelated factors –particularly workplace culture, organisational strategy, processes and structure and the allocation and structuring of work. While drawing out generic workplace factors helps to illuminate problematic aspects of LLS workplaces for trainees’ learning, it is important to recognise that the specific factors that determine a trainee’s access to support and their experiences of the workplace are highly localised (Orr and Simmons 2010).

### ***Wider system factors***

There is little primary data that connects LLS trainees’ workplace learning to the wider system; all the LLS trainee workplace learning studies listed in Table 1 drew on data at the level of the individual and/ or workplace, although they discuss findings within the broader policy and system context. It is beyond the scope of this paper to analyse the complex influences of policy and wider system factors on LLS workplaces or individual trainees’ perception and expectations of work. Instead, this section highlights the wider system issues that impinge on trainees’ workplace learning raised in LLS trainee workplace learning research.

Firstly, a key concern in the LLS trainee workplace learning research base, which mirrors the LLS literature more widely (for example Gleeson et al. 2005), is the impact of public sector

modernisation and a performative regime. This manifests itself in managerial cultures in LLS organisations, the intensification of work and privileging of paperwork. This may lead as the preceding section has indicated to restricted affordances for trainee learning. Furthermore, the performative emphasis on target-setting and assessment, driven through inspection as part of the LLS ITE reforms, promotes a rationalist judgmental approach to mentoring consequently restricting the availability of more interactive developmental support for trainees (Cullimore and Simmons 2010).

Secondly, the current standards-led approach to LLS ITE is criticised in a number of LLS trainee workplace learning studies. The highly detailed standards fail to capture the complexity and diversity of roles in the sector and the competence based approach places insufficient emphasis on trainees' knowledge development (Lucas 2004 and 2007; Maxwell 2010b). Furthermore, the enactment of the standards through mapping to ITE courses ignores workplace learning (Nasta 2007), and trainees do not value the standards as a support for learning:

‘Trainees saw their day-to-day interactions in their working lives as far more significant than deeply internalizing a set of national standards’ (p14)

Thirdly, while the ITE reforms have placed some responsibility on employers to provide mentors, they have neglected the need for trainees to enter into relationships with many ‘experts’ to build their subject teaching expertise (Lucas 2007). A fourth issue, which has been overlooked in the literature, is the way in which accountability has been operationalised through the inspection system. This has led to HE institutions who lead delivery partnerships, of mainly FE colleges, being graded and held accountable for all aspects of trainees’ learning and progress. While HE institutions should bear a high degree of responsibility for trainees’ learning, they have little power to influence the workplace conditions of their in-service trainees. The English inspection framework (Ofsted 2012) fails to place sufficient

responsibility on trainees' employers to ensure that trainees are provided with the workplace affordances they need to learn.

To summarise, the impact of public sector modernisation, a performative regime, standards-led ITE, the emphasis on mentoring at the expense of wider support and the misplacing of accountability contribute to the workplace conditions that restrict trainees' learning.

### **How may trainees' workplace learning be improved?**

As the preceding discussion has highlighted a range of interrelated individual, workplace and wider system factors impinge on trainees' workplace learning, in some instances significantly limiting the possibilities for trainees' learning. There is, therefore, a pressing need to create the conditions that can improve trainees' workplace learning. This section draws from the previous discussion to propose the key properties of the workplace affordances of support and experience that are necessary for trainee learning (Table 2) and the workplace conditions that give rise to these properties (Table 3). Improvement, however, is a contested concept that too often in LLS policy is enacted on the basis of the naive assumption that 'good practice' can be easily identified and unproblematically 'transferred' to other settings (Coffield and Edwards 2009). The suggestions for improvement presented here are not a simple prescription, but a basis for employers and others— trainees, mentors, teacher educators and policy makers - to review their contextually situated assumptions and practices and consider how existing barriers to trainees' workplace learning may be overcome.

As table 2 shows trainees require access to a range of varied teaching *experiences*, encompassing different levels and learner types, enabling them to develop their learning in communities of practice with learners. They need to be given the degree of responsibility necessary to fully immerse themselves in practice, trial and experiment with new approaches

to learning and teaching, and gain feedback on their practices from learners. While teaching opportunities should be sufficient in scale to enable trainees to gain competency, and sufficiently varied in scope and challenge, they should not be so daunting as to undermine trainees' self-esteem and confidence as a teacher.

In relation to *support* trainees require access to multiple relationships with colleagues, mentors and other experts to provide: formal and informal support; cognitive, practical, emotional and social support; models of practice and feedback on their teaching. Pedagogic or subject discussion, rather than bureaucratic compliance needs to be central in these relationships, while recognising that trainees also construct knowledge through engagement with the reified curriculum embedded in workplace documents and processes. While research evidence points to the existing fragmentation and weakness of LLS communities of practice (Avis and Bathmaker 2005), trainees' access to robust communities of practice has the potential to enhance their learning.

Both Lucas (2007) and Maxwell (2010a) have advocated the development of a 'workplace pedagogy', conceptualised by Billett (2002) as guided participation in intentionally structured workplace activities and interactions, together with recognition that individuals differ in ways they choose to participate. If adopted, mentors' roles would need to extend to facilitate and guide trainees' participation in the workplace curriculum. As the earlier discussion has highlighted trainees' prior experiences, personal characteristics and motivations affect their workplace engagement and orientation towards theoretical tools. Therefore mentors and colleagues need to supportively challenge trainees to recognise the ways in which their dispositions maybe limiting their engagement with workplace affordances. Mentors and colleagues also have a role to play in encouraging and supporting trainees in reflecting on practice and using theoretical and conceptual tools to develop

practice. Maxwell (2010a) proposes the use of practical theorising (Hagger and McIntyre 2006) to help trainees integrate theoretical and practical learning.

**[Table 2. about here]**

Table 3 lists the workplace conditions that research indicates are necessary prerequisites to providing the types of support and experiences that promote trainee learning (i.e. the properties set out in Table 2). Organisational and department or workgroup *cultures* are a key determinant of the availability and quality of experiences and interactions. Cultures that support trainee learning are underpinned by a strong commitment to trainees' learning, recognise that trainees have a dual role as trainee and teacher and value a developmental approach. More broadly such cultures value professional development and pedagogic expertise for all staff and privilege pedagogy over 'paperwork'. Within this type of culture there is an expectation that teachers will deliberately create opportunities to support trainees and that trainees will ask for support.

Cultures are enacted within *organisational strategies, processes and structures*. Trainee learning is enhanced when structural elements such as linking ITE and workforce development/HR and an infrastructure for mentoring are in place. Practical issues such as allocating time and specifying roles for those supporting trainees need to be addressed. Consideration needs to be given to the ways in which organisational strategies, structures and processes can support the development of robust communities of practice, in particular by providing encouragement and opportunities to share learning. Furthermore, attention needs to be paid to ensuring processes focus more strongly on pedagogy than paperwork. More specifically those making decisions about the *allocation and structuring of trainees' work* need to understand the scope, scale, types, nature and level of work that best supports trainee learning and recognise trainees' dual role as trainee and teacher.

**[Table 3. about here]**

It is striking how few of either the key properties of workplace affordances for learning (Table 2) or the workplace conditions necessary to provide those affordances (Table 3) appear in ITE policy<sup>2</sup>. The professional standards largely ignore these issues and with the exception of the requirement for a range of experience and mentor support they are given little priority in ITE inspection. The case for a refocusing of policy to take greater account of trainees' workplace learning and to hold employers to account for creating conditions that foster trainees' learning is strong.

**Future research agenda**

Attention has been drawn to the limited scale and scope of LLS trainee workplace learning research, which combined with evidence that suggests many trainees have limited access to the workplace affordances necessary for learning, indicates that a substantive programme of research and development work, involving researchers and employers, is necessary.

An important gap in the research base is extending understanding of how trainees learn through teaching experience and interactions with learners and the workplace conditions that best support this. Future research could usefully build on the research on learning through teaching experience in schools (Hagger et al. 2008), for example by examining the appropriateness of school findings in different LLS settings. There is also a need to broaden the perspectives and settings represented in LLS trainee learning research. This could be addressed through case study research in a range of LLS settings that brings together trainees' data with data from their colleagues, line managers, mentors and senior leaders and



documentary evidence. Such research would be enhanced by undertaking workplace observations, using Furner and Steadman's (2004) approach in researching early professional learning. A further gap in the research base is identifying the ways in which career intentions and attitudes towards staying or leaving the sector affect trainees' attitudes towards, and engagement in, workplace learning. The limited evidence base around the relationship between the wider system and trainees' workplace learning could be supplemented by policy implementation research.

In addition to larger scale research projects, development and research projects led by employers and supported by academics have the potential to stimulate action to develop workplace conditions that provide affordances for trainee learning and generate knowledge about the relational interdependence of individual trainees, workplace affordances for learning and workplace conditions. Undertaking such projects collaboratively across different providers has the potential to enhance the professional learning of those involved and influence wider system change.

## **Conclusions**

Any conclusions drawn at this time must be regarded as tentative due to the limitations of the LLS in-service trainees' workplace learning research base. Nonetheless, this synthesis of evidence provides an important step in advancing our understanding of the influences on trainees' workplace learning and how trainees' workplace learning may be improved. The evidence suggests that the workplace affordances of teaching experiences and support are crucial to trainee development. However, workplace conditions in the LLS do not appear to support the type, quality or range of experiences and support required for trainee development. The key properties of the trainee experiences and support that are necessary for trainee development and the workplace conditions that facilitate these affordances have been drawn out from the research base (Tables 2 and 3). These can be used by employers, and

others interested in trainee development, as a starting point for consideration of how, within their context, trainees' workplace learning may be improved. Furthermore, trainees require support to recognise and address the ways in which their dispositions may be limiting their engagement with workplace affordances.

There is a mismatch between the current focus of LLS ITE policy, and indeed LLS policy more widely, and the policy measures necessary to enable employers to create the workplace conditions that will provide trainees with the experiences and support required for their development. Improving LLS trainees' workplace learning would require significant changes in policy as well as major changes within LLS organisations. These changes do though have the potential to improve the learning of all staff and would support organisational development. The current LLS trainee workplace learning research base is limited and requires an increase in both scale and scope to support these improvements.

## Notes

1. The statutory requirements for initial teacher education qualifications are:
  - Wales: Further Education Teachers' Qualification (Wales) Regulations 2002 (SI 2002/1663)
  - Northern Ireland: Circular FE 1/12 (DELNI, 2012)
  - England: the highly specified Further Education Teachers' Qualifications (England) Regulations 2007 (SI 2207/2264) are being replaced by employers deciding on appropriate qualifications (The Further Education Teachers' Qualification (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2012 (SI 2012/2166)).
  - Scotland: employers decide on appropriate qualifications and there are no compulsory qualifications. However, there are statutory powers in the (Teachers (Education, Training and Recommendation for Registration) (Scotland) Regulations 1993 to approve the Teaching Qualification TQ(FE) award delivered by universities.
2. LLS ITE policy in all the home nations is underpinned by professional standards (LLUK 2007a; 2007b; 2009; Scottish Executive 2006). These document include summaries of each country's policy. For further information on English policy see Lucas and Nasta (2010); Lingfield (2012) and LSIS (2013). For current Scottish policy see <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Education/UniversitiesColleges/17135/9004>

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