

# PARTNERSHIP IN ENGLISH INITIAL TEACHER EDUCATION: CHANGING TIMES, CHANGING DEFINITIONS – EVIDENCE FROM THE TEACHER TRAINING AGENCY NATIONAL PARTNERSHIP PROJECT<sup>1</sup>

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## ABSTRACT

This paper draws on findings from a national evaluation of the Teacher Training Agency's National Partnership Programme (NPP) (2001–2005) to analyse the current practice of partnership in initial teacher education in England. The paper begins by drawing on the MOTE studies (Furlong, *et al.*, 2000) undertaken in the 1990s to describe the practice of partnership during that decade. It goes on to describe the changing policy context of teacher education in England since new Labour came to power in 1997, including the Government's concern substantially to increase the numbers of new teachers entering the profession; it was this commitment, the authors argue, that was in part behind the development of the NPP which was intended to increase both the quality and capacity of schools to take part in initial teacher education. The authors go on to describe the NPP as it was put into practice in nine Government regions across England and their evaluation of it, which included 127 interviews with a range of stakeholders within each of the government regions. They suggest that, although the programme did probably contribute to increasing the numbers of partnership places in schools during its lifetime, the NPP did not alter the underlying model of partnership; indeed, they suggest that in many cases the practice of partnership in England had changed little since the mid 1990s. However, they conclude that the NPP did have an important impact on provision in that it further undermined the pedagogical and epistemological dimensions of partnership that many teacher educators in the 1990s saw as central to collaborative work between schools and higher education institutions (HEIs). The NPP, they suggest, further encouraged the development of a 'technical rationalist' approach to teacher education, an approach that fits well with new Labour's broader vision for the management of the teaching profession in England.

## INTRODUCTION

The idea that schools and universities or colleges should work together in some form of 'partnership' for the provision of initial teacher education (ITE) has a long history in England. It was an important recommendation of the 1944 McNair Report (McNair, 1944) and a generation later was a central proposal in the 1982 White Paper (DES, 1983) which later led to the establishment of CATE (the Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education). Under the second version of CATE (DES, 1989), all higher education institutions (HEIs) had to be overseen by a regional partnership committee, with an independent chair and a membership representing a wide range of local interests, including schools, Local Education Authorities (LEAs) and industry. However, it was not until 1992 (DES, 1992) that the government made it a requirement that the actual delivery of all initial teacher education had to be achieved through formal partnership arrangements between individual HEIs and individual schools. Since that time, 'partnership' has been one of the core principles of teacher education in England. Indeed, it could be argued that it is the concept and practice of partnership that is *the* distinguishing feature of initial teacher education in England today. And despite very substantial international interest in the concept of partnership (Brisard,

Menter and Smith, 2005), especially in the USA (Darling-Hammond, 1994a and b; Goodlad, 1988, 1990; Holmes Group 1990), Australia (DEST, 2003; Grundy, *et al.*, 1999; Grundy, *et al.*, 2001; Ramsey, 2000; Sachs, 2003) and New Zealand (McGee, 1995; 2001), to date it is only in England and Wales that partnership has become institutionalised at a national level as the core principle of provision.

But what does partnership look like in practice? One of the fullest studies of the development of partnership in England and Wales post 1992 was undertaken by the Modes of Teacher Education (MOTE) project (Furlong, *et al.*, 2000) where researchers documented the development of partnership in teacher education throughout the 1990s. Although they recorded widespread variation in the practice of partnership, they suggested that it was possible to identify at least three ideal typical models of partnership utilised in practice.

Firstly, there were those programmes that could be characterised as based on 'complementary partnerships'. The school and the university or college were seen as having separate and complementary responsibilities but there was no systematic attempt to bring these two dimensions into dialogue. In other words, there was partnership but not necessarily integration in the course; integration was something that the student him or herself had to achieve. This, Furlong *et al.* argue, was the model of partnership that was put forward within government circulars of the time (DES, 1992).

Amongst teacher educators, however, a very different model of partnership was being promulgated – one Furlong *et al.* characterise as 'collaborative'. At the heart of this model, they suggest, was the commitment to develop an educational programme where students were exposed to different forms of educational knowledge, some of which came from school, some of which came from higher education or elsewhere. Teachers were seen as having an equally legitimate but different body of professional knowledge from those in higher education. Students were expected and encouraged to use what they learned in school to critique what they learned within the college or university and vice versa. It was through this dialectic that they were expected to build up their own body of professional knowledge (McIntyre, 1990; 1994). For the model to succeed, teachers and lecturers needed opportunities to work and plan together on a regular basis; such on-going collaboration was seen as essential if they were to develop a programme of work for the student that was integrated between the higher education and the school.

However, despite the rhetorical popularity of the collaborative model, in reality Furlong, *et al.* suggest that the most common model during the 1990s was HEI-led. This model, they argue, was fundamentally different from the collaborative or the complementary model in that it was indeed led by those in the higher education institution, though sometimes with the help of a small cadre of teachers acting as consultants. With pressure growing on HEIs from the newly created inspection body, Ofsted, and the newly created Teacher Training Agency (TTA), course leaders increasingly found it necessary to utilise schools as a 'resource' in setting up common learning opportunities for their students. Within this idealised model, quality control was a high priority and this was something that HEI course leaders came to take increasingly seriously.

On reflection, it is clear that what the MOTE studies showed was that, during the 1990s, partnership in initial teacher education was not merely an organisational concept; the notion of partnership also incorporated important epistemological and pedagogical dimensions as well. In its epistemological dimension, partnership assumed that schools and HEIs were essentially different institutions that could give students access to different forms of professional knowledge. Universities gave access to knowledge based on theory, on research and, most importantly of all, on the synthesis of a broad range of 'indirect' practical experience encapsulated in professional literature and in the experience of higher education lecturers themselves.

Schools, on the other hand, gave access to knowledge based on direct practical experience itself<sup>3</sup>.

At the same time, the concept of partnership also had pedagogical dimensions. The MOTE case studies showed that when course leaders designed their courses, they were sensitive to the ways particular partnership arrangements were constructed — the patterns of arrangements for time in school and higher education, the sorts of support offered to students while they were in school, the types of assignments they were required to undertake — and all of these had major implications not only for what students would learn but also for how they would learn.

What the MOTE studies also revealed was that partnerships in teacher education did not always work well in practice. Finding ways for HEIs and schools to work together was and is highly challenging, not least because the ‘essential purposes’ of both sorts of institution are so different. Nevertheless, the MOTE studies would suggest that during the 1990s these tensions were essentially creative. The complexities of bringing schools and HEIs together encouraged teacher educators to ‘worry’ at the issues of epistemology and pedagogy; the sector as a whole was thinking hard about what students learned and how they learned and how that could be enshrined in course provision. We would suggest that it is because of this creative tension that school-university partnerships have come to be seen, internationally, as such an important strategy in supporting the systemic reform of both teacher education and schools themselves.

The MOTE studies were published in 2000 but the final fieldwork for the project was undertaken in 1996 – before the current government came to power. How, then, has the practice of partnership in England changed under successive new Labour governments? In this paper we draw on data from a recently completed evaluation of the TTA National Partnership Programme to try to answer this question.

#### *The contemporary context of partnership*

When new Labour came to power in 1997, the new government, with the close support of the TTA, continued many of the policies developed under previous Conservative administrations. What stayed broadly the same was the legal framework. In 2002, a revised Circular was issued (DES, 2002) which made very clear statements about partnership arrangements. It specified that all providers must work in partnership with schools and actively involve them in: planning and delivering initial teacher training; selecting trainee teachers; assessing trainee teachers for Qualified Teacher Status. In addition, they must set up partnership agreements which: make clear to everyone involved each partner’s role and responsibilities; set out arrangements for preparing and supporting all staff involved in training; and make clear how resources are divided and allocated between partners. Finally, they must make sure the partnership works effectively, and that the training is co-ordinated and consistent, with continuity across the various contexts where it takes place (DES, 2002, Requirement R3). It is these requirements that have been used as the basis for inspection by Ofsted.

However, while these statements may have set requirements out in somewhat stronger and more explicit language than before, essentially they were little different in aspiration from those set out in 1992 (DES, 1992), or even 1989 (DES, 1989). What has also remained unchanged from the Conservative era has been the role of Ofsted in ‘policing’ these requirements. Published inspection reports, grades and league tables remain a key part of the landscape of teacher education provision in England. Maintaining a competitive market in teacher education is seen to be just as important as in any other area of public sector provision (Furlong, 2005; Hughes, 2003; Newman, 2001). However, as a consequence of 10 years of these types of arrangements, we have now seen progressively greater conformity to the letter of regulation on partnership arrangements than in the past.

One significant change under new Labour, however, has been the dramatic expansion of the system. One of the key targets Labour set themselves when they came to power in 1997 was substantially to improve staff student ratios in primary schools. At the same time, demographic changes meant that there was an increasing demand for secondary school teachers, too. As a result, 'supply' has been a major government preoccupation and numbers have increased substantially with some 25,000 additional teachers in post now compared with five years ago (Clarke, 2004). This has in turn put significant strain on the system, especially in terms of ensuring that there are sufficient partner schools willing to participate in the training of these new numbers.

At the same time, the Government has also continued to challenge the HEI 'monopoly' on supply by encouraging the introduction of a whole range of new routes into teaching which have been accompanied by a re-definition of what partnership is. SCITT schemes (School Centred Initial Teacher Training led and managed by schools themselves) have continued to be encouraged, despite the low rating of many of them by Ofsted, but other new school-based routes into teaching have been developed with the Graduate Teacher Programme (GTP) (an employment-based route, theoretically for older entrants), 'Teach First' (another employment-based route for 'high flying' new graduates wishing to experience teaching for a year or two), and the 'flexible PGCE' (a teacher education programme that can be taken on a flexible part-time basis). The GTP scheme in particular has been a significant development with currently over 6,000 entrants a year following this employment-based route.

It is because of these new routes that, within the legal framework, the concept of partnership itself has had to be expanded. Now it is recognised that 'partnerships' may take a variety of different forms. They might include:

- schools working in partnership with an HEI on undergraduate and/or postgraduate programmes;
- several schools working together, with or without the involvement of an HEI, to provide school-centred ITT (SCITT);
- a school working with an LEA, HEI or another school to provide an employment-based route to QTS (DES, 2002, Guidance Notes, p.84).

Since new Labour came to power, there have therefore been some important developments in the context in which partnership is practised. But how is it practised in reality? In the next section of this paper we introduce the TTA's National Partnership Project which we were invited to evaluate in 2004/5. Through this evaluation we were able to gain an important insight into the current practice of partnership in teacher education in England.

#### THE NATIONAL PARTNERSHIP PROJECT AND OUR EVALUATION

The National Partnership Project (NPP) was an initiative set up by the TTA between 2001 and 2005<sup>4</sup> with a view to promoting partnership across England. It was designed to bring teacher education providers, schools, LEAs and other stakeholders together in order to: increase training capacity in schools; improve the quality of teacher education in schools; and address the training skills needed by teachers working in teacher education.

The project was organised on a regional basis with a Regional Partnership Manager (RPM) being appointed in each of the nine government regions across England; each RPM was required to set up a Regional Steering Committee. Though the constitution and working procedures of these committees varied across the country, they were all required to include representation from schools, HEIs, LEAs and other regional stakeholders and cover the full range of different types of provision

(traditional, school-based, employment-based, etc). The scheme was coordinated nationally by a national partnership manager at the TTA and had a budget of approximately £1,700,000 per year to support small scale projects that were designed locally to meet the project's national objectives. Popular initiatives included: setting up common mentor training programmes; designing common school-based training materials for students; undertaking 'outreach work' with potential new partnership schools; supporting specialist training events for students from a range of different courses in the region; sharing good practice and harmonising partnership procedures between schools and across providers.

Other separately funded initiatives that fell within the NPP programme included the Partnership Promotion Schools scheme where designated schools received small scale funding to undertake outreach work with schools in their region. There was also a termly glossy newspaper, DoingITT, which was distributed in generous numbers to every school and HEI in each region and a centrally funded 'school usage survey' which was an attempt to document the numbers of teacher education places offered by schools across the country.<sup>5</sup>

Interestingly, when we came to undertake our evaluation, it became apparent that although it had its own objectives, budget and working procedures, on the ground, the NPP was closely related to a cluster of other initiatives also designed to support the development of schools' involvement in initial teacher education. For example, many of the schools we visited were already designated Training Schools (DES, 2004). In June 2004 there were 168 such schools in England, each receiving additional funding from the DfES in recognition of their strong track record in training. As Training Schools they were required to build up and share good practice both within their existing partnership networks and beyond. And some individual teachers we met were designated Advanced Skills Teachers with additional funding from the DfES to undertake development work in teacher education in their own schools and beyond.

While each of these other initiatives had its own objectives, there was clearly a very strong overlap between them. Taken as a whole, we estimated that the total budget for supporting different types of partnership initiatives during the period we were evaluating NPP was c £6,000,000 per year. Because many of the projects and individuals engaged in them overlapped, we found it impossible in any hard and fast way to limit our evaluation to the NPP project itself. Indeed, given that all of these projects had broadly the same objective — increasing the quality and capacity of schools to contribute to initial teacher education — artificial divisions would have been inappropriate. What the rich array of government sponsored activity 'on the ground' did give us, however, was a unique insight into the contemporary practice of partnerships involved in initial teacher education in England.

The aim of our evaluation, on behalf of the TTA, was to examine the impact of the National Partnership Project against its broad objectives — in other words, its role in increasing the capacity for and quality of schools' contribution to initial teacher education.

Our methodology involved primary data collection and secondary data analysis using questionnaires, interviews, and documentary analysis. In the summer of 2004 we conducted semi-structured interviews, semi-structured focus groups and documentary analysis in each of the nine regions. Each Regional Partnership Manager (RPM) selected a representative sample to allow for coverage of a variety of projects and participants. This allowed the RPM to 'showcase' developments in the region, although it did not provide an 'independent', representative sample.<sup>6</sup> A total of 127 participants were interviewed plus the head of the ITT Partnership within the TTA itself. Secondary data was collected from the TTA offices during autumn/winter of 2004/5 and via the World Wide Web.

Because our evaluation was focused primarily on the range of new initiatives being developed to support partnership in England, we cannot claim to have a



complete overview of current practice. Nevertheless, our evaluation was nationally based and did give us access to a very broad range of course leaders, senior teachers and LEA officials involved in teacher education today. As such our evidence does, we believe, give us probably the best picture of practice of partnership in England that is currently available.

#### CONTINUITY AND CHANGE IN THE PRACTICE OF PARTNERSHIP

The first thing to note is that our evidence confirmed some important continuities with partnership arrangements in the 1990s. For example, one essential feature of the English model of partnership is that it remains a voluntary relationship as far as schools are concerned. As a result, while many schools take part in initial teacher education year after year, some do not. In principle, therefore, the partnership relationship is an unequal one and can be an unstable one.

Another constant was that there is still very substantial variation between courses in terms of course structures and working practices of partnership. Some HEIs reported only visiting students once during any placement (one HEI called this an 'independent' partnership) while others made much more frequent visits. Some courses had developed frameworks and activities for students while in schools so that there was a common curriculum closely integrated between HEIs and schools, while others had not, leaving it essentially to schools themselves to develop their own programmes within a broadly agreed structure. In some courses, the detail of university and school sessions was routinely planned in a collaborative way by teachers and lecturers working together, while in other cases content was centrally prescribed. And in some courses, teachers had the lead responsibility in assessing students' teaching competence and in supervising and assessing assignments, while in others they did not.

Another unchanging feature was that schools varied considerably in their commitment to and enthusiasm for involvement in initial teacher education; some were enthusiastic, others much less so. As one HEI respondent said:

Lots of schools are 'intelligent' and pushing the boundaries to the edge and some haven't moved for 15 years and won't take on extra work.

This difficulty of getting some schools to take on the responsibilities now expected of them was particularly an issue with primary schools, as it had been in the 1990s. As this HEI tutor explained:

we're in now a phase of introducing schools to our new expectations and that's been challenging at times and so getting primary schools to recognise the sort of contribution that they should make to partnership has been difficult.

Nevertheless, despite these continuities with past practice, there was evidence that many providers, particularly those in new (post 1992) universities, were working in a context that was substantially different from the past. It was constantly changing both as a result of the expansion of the system and because of the development of 'new routes'. As this HEI lecturer explained:

...in the last 5 years all of the programmes have been reviewed, the nature of them has been changed; we've diversified in what we offer and how we offer it. So we offer every type of route available now, full-time, part-time, under-grads, post-grads, SCITT, employment based.

Other providers may not have experienced all of these changes at the same time; nevertheless, the majority had experienced some of them. And because of the substantial increase in student numbers in the early 2000s, it was evident that more and more schools and individual teachers have simply had to become involved in initial teacher education. For the most part, we learned that this expansion in the

demand for school places had been accommodated relatively smoothly – a significant achievement for the sector as a whole. And although our secondary data analysis of TTA records revealed little *direct* evidence that this was specifically attributable to the NPP, it is likely that it and its associated projects did contribute to that achievement in important ways.

The general context for partnership in the early 2000s, therefore, was one of both continuity and change. Partnership arrangements remained voluntary and variable but there was a rapidly expanding and diversifying system. In this context, how did the NPP and its associated programmes set out to achieve their twin aims of increasing the capacity and quality of the practice of partnership?

#### THE NATIONAL PARTNERSHIP PROGRAMME – WAYS OF WORKING

Perhaps the first thing to note is that as a result of our field work we became aware that, through NPP and its associated initiatives, a whole range of school-based colleagues had developed a new commitment to school-based teacher education; indeed, for many it had opened important ‘new career’ opportunities (Reid, *et al.*, 2004). Most of the teachers we interviewed were senior staff who now had teacher education as a formal part of their job descriptions – they worked with students, liaised with those in higher education and the LEA and with other teachers with similar roles in other schools. Many of them had a more general staff development role in their schools as well, being responsible for newly qualified teachers and other forms of school-based professional development.

The NPP had helped strengthen the position of these ‘new career’ trainers in schools. In addition, it had started to establish a regional perspective on provision. For the first time *all* providers of teacher education in a particular region were required to work together – schools, HEIs, GTP providers, SCITTS. In some regions, it also brought LEAs into the picture in a formal way for the first time and, in those regions, LEA representatives were becoming powerful advocates of schools’ involvement in partnership arrangements of all sorts.

More specifically, though, each Regional Steering Committee set up a series of initiatives, designed at local level and intended to respond to local need. However, in reality there was considerable commonality in the range of projects undertaken. For example, with the help of NPP, many courses had set up a range of new structures to support school-based work. Several universities had funded the part-time secondment of a local teacher, some of them Advanced Skills Teachers, to undertake liaison between the university and schools. Other universities had used funding to establish committees and working groups which had the time and resources to bring school and university staff together to develop different aspects of the course – the curriculum, assessment procedures, etc.

Several others used funding to develop new materials – DVDs, training packs and one-off training events. However, there were two strategies that were particularly widely used – these were ‘outreach work’ and strategies to promote collaboration between different stakeholders.

#### *Outreach work*

A great many projects involved outreach work where experienced teachers would work alongside other teachers and schools that were less experienced, as this teacher explained:

We were put in touch with a school in X who were interested in developing ITT and we have been out there and have developed an ITT programme with the school and trained subject mentors and raised the profile and this year we have subject specialists going in and we are doing joint observation with them.

But outreach work was not only focused on bringing new schools into partnership arrangements; it was also used to enhance the quality and commitment of existing partnership schools, as this primary head explained:

We have seen a great shift in the role of what is expected in primary schools and it is making sure that any staff in primary schools are really aware of that... When we began the outreach work the schools we began with were totally unaware of the change of roles.

or this Advanced Skills Teacher who was directly involved in offering training:

What I have been doing is to train subject mentors, so last year we ran a session where we got subject mentors together and that was a success and we are doing that again this year so we get cross fertilization – that is in the cluster of eight schools.

Outreach work was of course also central to the remit of Training Schools and each of those we learned about had their own programme of activities. One head of a First School that was a designated Training School claimed to have trained over 100 teachers on her mentor training programme. Another said:

I've used money to bring together groups of teachers. We do coaching, and we've developed handbooks and ITT books which we can use across the partnership...

#### *New forms of collaboration*

More challenging than outreach work but nevertheless welcomed by many we spoke to was the development of new forms of collaboration between providers working in the same region. For example, one Regional Partnership Manager explained that, from his perspective, a key advantage for SCITTS being linked to NPP was that they got exposed to good practice, recognising that, because of their small size, they would simply not be able to develop things for themselves. But from our interviews, we noted that amongst all participants there was a growing appreciation of each other's contribution to teacher education. As this lecturer explained:

The last three years have been a period which I have found rewarding in that we've moved much more towards collaboration with other providers, and there's no doubt that the TTA project has furthered that agenda... It hasn't always been easy and I was introduced to the word 'co-operation', which I actually like, because it recognises a reality but also encourages us to cooperate in whatever ways we can.

We were told many examples of providers sharing information and helping each other in different ways, helping each other with placements in a particular area or passing on applicants they could not accommodate; a new culture of cooperation was emerging.

In addition to this increased general support, there was also a wide range of specific projects designed to enhance collaboration. For example, a number of institutions were experimenting with developing common mentor training programmes across their region, while others were focusing on drawing up common documentation:

It's led to a number of successful outcomes, I think, some of which one couldn't have predicted would be possible two years ago; for example, we've negotiated common partnership agreements for all of the local providers in primary and secondary.

Another group of providers had developed a common framework for assessment and were collaborating on how to work with remote rural schools.

But despite the moves towards new forms of collaboration, our fieldwork also



reminded us that teacher education provision also retains many competitive elements too: 'co-operation' is indeed a good word. Collaboration was much easier when there was little competition for school places but we were aware that, in some parts of the country, that competition remained severe – not helped, some argued, by the TTA's own working procedures.

The problem is that the TTA allocate places to providers without looking at placements, so X University (nearby) has recently opened up as a DRB7 in the shortage subjects which are difficult to place anyway – so all you do is create more competition for the schools. So the TTA plan the student numbers but not the placements.

And despite its aspiration to promote collaboration, the NPP had also increased the competition in some ways by setting up new competitive providers. Partnership Promotion Schools, for example, were free to work with any schools they chose and Training Schools were also entirely independent, as this senior teacher from a Training School made clear:

Our vision as a Training School is to offer a very inclusive plan of training to all our stakeholders, ITT, unqualified staff, NQTs, EPD and CPD, working in partnership with our university partners, our other local schools, our primary partners, the LEA. We try our best. My vision is we would be like a training hub for the north of (our county).

In some parts of the country, therefore, there was a sense that the politics of teacher education were starting to change. As one HEI lecturer, recently recruited from school, said:

As HEIs we are in a changing market. Schools are stronger; schools have potential to become independent and HEIs need to respond to the changing environment.

The NPP could therefore promote collaboration where that was beneficial to all parties, but it could not actually reduce competition. Despite the best efforts of Regional Partnership Managers and their committees, there was thus a real danger of fragmentation, lack of coordination and duplication in the provision that was being developed.

#### DISCUSSION

One of the many interesting things about the NPP is how much it reflects new Labour approaches to public sector management; it is the very model of 'third way' public management (Giddens, 1999; 2000): the continuing influence of the strong regulatory framework (everything was underpinned by reference to 'the standards'); the continuing emphasis on inspection and competition (for league table results, for student recruitment, for student places in schools) but overlaid with a more superficial emphasis on cooperation and networking (Bently, 2003; Hargreaves, 2003); the establishment of new careers with opportunities for new forms of extended professionalism for those leading the projects (Hoyle, 1974; Reid, *et al.*, 2004); its approach to regionalism (the compromise between local initiatives and a national framework); and indeed its 'short-termism' (NPP lasted just over three years, designed, first and foremost to support a manifesto commitment to increase the supply of teachers). All of these are hallmarks of contemporary government practice. They are all familiar strategies used by new Labour to try to achieve its 'third way', 'harnessing the market' to its modernising aspirations (Newman, 2001; Power and Whitty, 1999).

But our aim here is not to comment on issues of governance, rather it is to reflect on what NPP can tell us about the current practice of partnership in England. The first thing to note is that many of those who had been involved in teacher education

for any period of time felt that in reality nothing much had changed. Although there were many new supporters of the partnership approach, the role assigned to teachers was not fundamentally different from that envisaged in 1992; NPP was about making the existing model work rather than developing an entirely new one. As one course leader put it more succinctly:

We have “moved” to a new model of partnership, although it was a model that we probably should have been with five years previously.

At one level, we would agree with this observation. We met many new enthusiasts for involving teachers in teacher education but in some ways nothing much had changed since 1992; what NPP did was to provide the support needed to allow teachers to take on these responsibilities.

But at another level, NPP did represent a very important change in the conception of partnership in that it further encouraged a technical-rationalist approach to training (Popkewitz, 1987). At the beginning of this paper we commented that, in the 1990s, the notion of partnership had important epistemological and pedagogical dimensions to it. Schools and universities, the main partners, were seen as giving access to different forms of professional knowledge; specific arrangements set up by courses for work in school and work within higher education were themselves seen as providing different sorts of learning opportunities for beginning teachers. Courses may have varied significantly in their approach to partnership but the vast majority of course leaders remained committed to the notion that partnership did indeed raise important epistemological and pedagogical issues; that is why getting it right was so important.

But in what ways did NPP undermine these notions? Firstly, in the very conception of what a partnership was. As we noted at the beginning of this paper, under its contemporary conception, as promoted by the TTA, partnerships can take many forms – between schools and HEIs, between schools and LEAs and between schools and schools; they need not involve work with higher education at all. As a result, the epistemological dimension of partnership is suppressed. Partnership arrangements are no longer predicated on the complex task of bringing together partners who provide access to different conceptions of professional knowledge. The complexity and contestability of professional knowledge is therefore no longer seen to be at the heart of what partnership is about; professional knowledge becomes simplified, flattened, it is essentially about contemporary practice in schools.

A further factor subtly undermining more complex notions of partnership was the new autonomy granted to schools in the development of their work. As some commentators we met recognised, there was a real tension in that autonomy, particularly in the outreach work now being undertaken. When schools offer their own mentor training — in a competitive market; when individual teachers set out on their own to recruit new schools into partnership arrangements; when groups of teachers work together on the development of their own training materials or one-off training events — there is a real danger of undermining the complexity of professional education. We would contend that when partnership is reduced to ‘finding more places’ or setting up common procedures and paper work, without paying attention to the epistemological and pedagogical issues underpinning any one particular teacher education programme, it undermines the nature of the professional education that is offered. Once again, it flattens complexity and reduces teacher education to technical rationalist tasks.

This is not to suggest that all of the individuals we met during our evaluation — whether they be from schools, HEIs, LEAs or even the Regional Partnership Managers themselves — subscribed to such a technical rationalist approach; a minority may have done but many did not. However, it is to recognise that the structure and organization of NPP clearly had these assumptions built into it and encouraged this tendency.

In the MOTE studies of partnership undertaken in the 1990s, Furlong, *et al.* (2000) set out a series of tables, illustrating some of the key features of the different models of partnership they identified. Below we set out a similar table identifying the key features of the model of partnership we identified as being put forward by the NPP – we call it the National Partnership Model where ‘lead providers’, be they universities, colleges or any number of other organisations, are required to act as ‘lead agent’ for the government in the provision of national programme of training.

*Table 1: The idealised features of the National Partnership Model of training*

The ‘National Partnership Model’ where HEIs, DRBs or SCITTs can be the ‘lead provider’	
Planning	Lead provider is the lead agent and works with (other) schools for the delivery of a nationally defined programme of teacher training where course structures and content (standards) are centrally defined. Planning is about planning how the lead provider and partner schools can ‘deliver’.
Lead provider visits to schools other partners	Strong emphasis on quality assurance and control, monitoring that training is delivered in line with nationally prescribed learning and opportunities.
Documentation	Strongly emphasised, defining tasks across different schools.
Content	Government defined standards set out what students should learn in school and where appropriate in the HEI.
Mentoring	School-based mentors trained to deliver government defined standards.
Assessment	Both schools and lead provider work within a common standards framework.
Contractual relationship	Lead provider becomes the ‘agent’ for delivery of a government programme, schools are sub-contractors, agreeing to deliver their part with lists of tasks and responsibilities set out clearly in the partnership agreement.
Legitimation	A clear framework of national standards for the delivery of a national system of initial teacher training.

#### CONCLUSION

The National Partnership Project was short lived and, given its short life, it is important to recognise its achievements. As we acknowledged earlier, because both NPP and our evaluation were cut short, our evaluation cannot claim to be methodologically robust. That is, we did not have the chance to talk to a full sample of stakeholders; we only met those who were connected directly with the programme itself. Nevertheless, there was plenty of evidence that, across the country, teachers individually and schools as a whole were embracing their role in teacher education in a much more robust way than in the past. The underlying model of partnership may not have changed fundamentally since 1992 but, as we saw, more and more teachers and schools are now taking their role seriously; and they are recognising the benefits for themselves individually, for their schools and for the profession as a whole from doing that.

But we do need to recognise that the NPP as a whole has also encouraged a further move to a technical rationalist approach to ‘training’; as such, we would argue that it fits well with new Labour’s technical rationalist approach to the management of the teaching profession more generally (Mahony and Hextall, 2000; Furlong, 2005).

By way of conclusion we finish with these two quotations that show very different views of the future of partnership in England. The first is from a highly experienced HEI lecturer:

Partnership should be about how to get thinking into the system. Where it is done badly in my experience, and that is where some GTP programmes failed, is that they did not do that thinking about what it means to learn to be a teacher... Part of the problem — a severe problem — is that there are those of us who have spent many years thinking about the processes of learning to be a teacher whereas teachers may be extremely good at teaching but don't know why; they have not done the meta-cognition to think about that and trainees need access to that meta-cognition.

And this is from the head of a successful Training School:

All the really good things that I've done in partnership with the university, that have benefited our staff, the trainee teachers, the school, the universities, none of them have been through the NPP, all of them have been through personal relations and contacts that I've got anyway. Lots of the things that I'd really like to do, just don't fit — they wouldn't go through, they don't fit the tick box — so I think if you let the universities and schools have a much freer hand, if you let us say what would be good for our region and let us write our own brief rather than make a 'one size fits all', then I think that you might get some really interesting stuff going on here.

Despite their very different perspectives and institutional commitments, what these two teacher educators share is their opposition to the technical rationalist model of training currently being promoted by the Government.; their commitment to confronting the complexities of pupil learning and of professional education; their opposition to being reduced to 'lead agents'. From our national evaluation, however, we conclude that there is a clear sense of them swimming against the tide.

#### NOTES

- 1 An earlier version of the paper was presented at the BERA 2005 conference, University of Glamorgan.
- 2 We would like to acknowledge the contribution of Katharine Burn, Hazel Hagger, Jane McNicholl and Trevor Mutton of Oxford University who assisted with some of the field work underpinning this paper.
- 3 For a fuller discussion of these different forms of knowledge in initial teacher education, see Furlong, *et al.* (1988).
- 4 When we first bid to undertake the evaluation, NPP was expected to continue until at least 2006 and we were initially invited to design a three year evaluation. However, by the time our evaluation commenced, the completion date for NPP was expected to be summer 2005; our evaluation was therefore designed for two years. In the event, NPP was closed by the TTA in 2005, a date that coincided with both the change of remit for the TTA and reduced forecasts about the future demand for primary and secondary school teachers in England. As a result, the second year of our planned evaluation was cancelled.
- 5 The intention was that the school usage survey would prove a useful resource for course leaders but the poor quality of the data available meant that in the end it was not successful.
- 6 A second round of primary data collection was originally planned for spring and summer 2005 when it was intended that the evaluation team would conduct fieldwork with a range of different participants of their own selection (rather than that of the RPMs). It was also intended to visit schools and providers less fully involved with the scheme to document their perceptions of it. However, because of the change of remit for the TTA, the evaluation was terminated after only one rather than its original two years duration. As a result, we have to accept that our qualitative data is largely derived from a sample of participants who were closely involved in the scheme; others less closely involved may well have had a rather different view of its strengths and weaknesses.
- 7 Designated Recommending Body – responsible for administering and providing assessment for the employment-based Graduate Teacher Programme.

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