

# Birmingham City University

## Initial Teacher Education inspection report

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**Provider address**

Faculty of Education, Law and Social Sciences  
Attwood Building  
Perry Barr  
Birmingham  
B42 2SU

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Harriet Harper HMI

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## Introduction

1. This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors supported by two specialist inspectors in accordance with the *Framework for the Inspection of Initial Teacher Education (2008-11)*.
2. The inspection draws upon evidence from all aspects of the provision to make judgements against all parts of the inspection evaluation schedule in the framework. Inspectors focused on the overall effectiveness of the training in supporting high quality outcomes for trainees and the capacity of the partnership to bring about further improvements. A summary of the grades awarded is included at the end of this report.

## Key to inspection grades

Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Satisfactory
Grade 4	Inadequate

## Explanation of terms used in this report

**Attainment** is defined as the standard reached by a trainee at the end of their training.

**Progress** is judged in terms of how well a trainee has developed professionally from their starting point to the standard reached at the time of the inspection or at a suitable review point.

**Achievement** is judged in terms of the progress made and the standard reached by a trainee at the time of the inspection or at a recent assessment review point.

## The provider

3. Birmingham City University works in partnership with South Birmingham College and the Brasshouse Language Centre to provide initial teacher education for teachers and trainers in the further education (FE) system. Courses lead to the university's professional and post-graduate certificates in education (PGCE). The pre-service PGCE course is offered on a full-time and part-time basis. The university has recently introduced a part-time route on the PGCE, specialising in English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) and/or literacy. The first cohort of trainees on this pathway is due to complete at the end of the current academic year.
4. At the time of the inspection, 64 trainees were enrolled on the full-time PGCE and 33 on the part-time PGCE. Trainees undertake their placements primarily in FE colleges and prisons but also in work-based learning and adult and

community settings and, in a few cases, schools. Based at the Brasshouse Language Centre, 13 trainees were enrolled on the specialist ESOL and/or literacy pathway. In addition, 48 trainees were completing the part-time in-service diploma in professional studies, which is no longer offered by the university.

## Key strengths

5. The key strengths are:
  - the good attainment and good progress made by trainees, regardless of their academic, professional or social background
  - the intensive and highly effective pastoral and academic support from tutors and mentors that plays a pivotal role in trainees' good professional development
  - rigorous recruitment and selection arrangements that ensure that all trainees are not only well qualified but are also committed to their subject and enthusiastic about working in the post compulsory education sector
  - the inclusive ethos that underpins the partnership's teacher education courses and the positive impact this has on the way in which trainees promote equality and value diversity in their own practice
  - the sharing of good practice across teacher education phases that has begun to have a positive impact on trainees' experience.

## Required action

6. In order to improve its capacity to improve, the partnership must:
  - focus all quality and self-assessment activities more sharply on the impact they have on trainees' outcomes.

## Recommendations

7. In order to improve trainees' progress and attainment, the partnership should:
  - tighten the quality assurance of mentoring to ensure that all trainees benefit from the very best practice
  - clarify the purpose of the e-portfolio and develop it further so that it becomes a valuable resource for all trainees.
8. To increase the proportion of trainees who become outstanding practitioners, the partnership should:
  - ensure that all trainees, including those who achieve well, are challenged to reach their full potential.
9. In order to improve the planning for improvement, the partnership should:
  - use attainment data more effectively to identify performance trends across different groups of trainees.

## Overall effectiveness

**Grade:2**

10. The overall effectiveness of the partnership in securing high quality outcomes for trainees is good. Trainees' overall attainment by the end of the course is good. Over the past three years, an increasing proportion of trainees have made good or better progress to fulfil their potential. All groups of trainees make comparable progress with no significant differences in achievement. Almost all trainees successfully complete the course. These good outcomes are the result of very high levels of personal support for all trainees, good training, clear communication with placement providers and effective mentoring.
11. The trainees have many strengths, evident even for the current cohort at the time of the inspection which was early on in their course. They demonstrate a strong commitment to teaching in the post-compulsory sector and they have clear ideas about different ways to teach their subject. They provide a well-considered rationale for the lessons they teach, taking into account the needs of their students as well as syllabus requirements.
12. New trainees recognise the progress they have made in a short time period whilst being fully aware that they have a great deal more to learn. They evaluate thoughtfully why some approaches to teaching are more effective than others and recognise the value of critical reflection in improving their practice. Former trainees acknowledge that the course has been instrumental in ensuring that they retain a highly reflective approach to their professional development.
13. Trainees are at ease with technology and use it well to support learning in classrooms and workshops. They make extensive use of the university's virtual learning environment to access and upload resources and to exchange ideas with their tutors and colleagues. Trainees develop their own e-portfolio that encapsulates their expertise, experience and qualifications. For some former trainees, this has been a useful tool which they have continued to use in their professional lives after completion of the course. However, there remains some confusion amongst tutors, mentors and trainees about the nature and purpose of the e-portfolio.
14. Both former and current trainees have a good understanding of equality and diversity, primarily due to the inclusive ethos at the university that permeates all aspects of the provision. They are confident in handling sensitive topics in lessons, in dealing with actual or potential conflicts and in challenging stereotypes. They understand how the way in which they promote diversity has an impact on the attitudes of their students, although the extent to which they plan to address diversity in lessons is variable.
15. Trainees speak highly of the quality of teacher training. They recognise that their tutors provide a model of good practice. In particular, trainees value the subject-specific workshops, which have enabled them to engage productively in

debates about pedagogy with colleagues who teach in the same subject or vocational area.

16. Revised and highly effective recruitment and selection arrangements are good and identify each applicant's potential and aptitude for teaching. The process successfully elicits trainees' knowledge of, and enthusiasm for, working in the post-compulsory education sectors. Subject audits are used to good effect to identify trainees' knowledge and skills at the start of the course. These are monitored throughout the year to ensure that trainees make appropriate progress in developing and applying their subject knowledge and/or vocational expertise.
17. Trainees benefit from intensive support from a range of different individuals and this, along with rigorous recruitment and selection, accounts for the fact that so few fail the course. The professional development tutor plays a pivotal role in ensuring that trainees are on track to succeed. These tutors monitor trainees' progress throughout the course and regularly review trainees' targets. Targets arise out of lesson observations as well as from information technology and subject audits; most are sharp, timed and developmental but a small minority are too generic to be of real value to trainees. As the calibre of trainee joining the course improves, the partnership needs to ensure that all targets are sufficiently challenging in order to increase the proportion of trainees who become outstanding teachers. In addition to the tutor, 'critical friends' provide trainees with useful informal support.
18. Mentors also provide good support and are instrumental in helping trainees to develop their professional knowledge and skills. They provide detailed and constructive feedback on trainees' teaching and monitor progress from one observation to the next. The quality of their feedback remains variable, though, and in a small minority of cases pays too little attention to the impact of trainees' teaching on the progress their students make.
19. Overall, the quality of provision across the partnership is good. The course director, supported by the professional development tutors, keeps a watchful eye on all providers and intervenes promptly to minimise inconsistencies in practice.
20. The extent to which resources are deployed to secure the best possible outcomes for trainees is good. Tutors, the key resource for trainees, respond rapidly to questions and/or concerns raised by trainees. As a consequence of a reorganisation at the university and changes in secondary provision, the university has been able to make good use of expertise in other phases to benefit trainees on FE teacher education courses. Access to teaching resources and technology is generally good although variable in some placement settings.

## **The capacity for further improvement and/or sustaining high quality**

**Grade: 2**

21. Over the past three years, there has been an upward trend in the proportion of trainees judged to be good or better at the end of the course. This reflects good leadership and management of the course. The self-evaluation process is thorough and honest and judgements about trainees' attainment are accurate. However, the self-evaluation document and associated improvement plans, despite improvements since the last inspection, remain too descriptive and fail to focus sufficiently on the impact of actions taken on trainees' performance.
22. The partnership has analysed data on success and retention rates by ethnicity, gender and disability, noting some emerging trends, but has yet to make full use of attainment data. It has not, for example, reviewed trainees' attainment by placement provider or subject area.
23. Working within a volatile context, with uncertainties around funding and political direction, the university demonstrates a good ability to anticipate change and prepare for, and respond to, national and local initiatives. It has withdrawn its part-time in-service course so as not to duplicate or compete with local provision and has developed the ESOL/literacy PGCE to meet a specific need within the FE sector. University staff have productive links with a wide range of local and national networks, helping them to keep up-to-date with developments and research.
24. The effectiveness of the partnership in planning and taking action for improvement is good. Since the last inspection, the partnership has successfully revised its recruitment and selection arrangements and this has had a demonstrable impact on the calibre of new trainees. It has put in place systems to ensure that trainees have access to a wide range of teaching opportunities and improved the quality and consistency of target-setting for trainees. The quantity and quality of mentor training has improved but, as acknowledged by the partnership, this remains an area for further development to ensure that all trainees have access to the very best mentoring. The sharing of good practice across all the university's teacher education provision has had a positive impact on FE trainees, for example through the use of subject audits and subject-specific workshops.

## **Annex: Partnership colleges**

The partnership includes the following colleges:

South Birmingham College

The Brasshouse Language Centre



## Summary of inspection grades<sup>1</sup>

**Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding; grade 2 is good; grade 3 is satisfactory; grade 4 is inadequate.**

### Overall effectiveness

		ITE for FE
<b>How effective is the provision in securing high quality outcomes for trainees?</b>		<b>2</b>
Trainees' attainment	How well do trainees attain?	2
Factors contributing to trainees' attainment	To what extent do recruitment / selection arrangements support high quality outcomes?	2
	To what extent does the training and assessment ensure that all trainees progress to fulfil their potential given their ability and starting points?	2
	To what extent are available resources used effectively and efficiently?	2
The quality of the provision	To what extent is the provision across the partnership of consistently high quality?	2
Promoting equalities and diversity	To what extent does the provision promote equality of opportunity, value diversity and eliminate harassment and unlawful discrimination?	2

### Capacity to improve further and/or sustain high quality

		ITE for FE
<b>To what extent do the leadership and management at all levels have the capacity to secure further improvements and/or to sustain high quality outcomes?</b>		<b>2</b>
How effectively does the management at all levels assess performance in order to improve or sustain high quality?		2
How well does the leadership at all levels anticipate change, and prepare for and respond to national and local initiatives?		2
How effectively does the provider plan and take action for improvement?		2

<sup>1</sup> The criteria for making these graded judgements are in the *Grade criteria for the inspection of ITE 2008-11*; Ofsted November 2009; Reference no: 080128.

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