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Dear Ms Webb

Ofsted inspection of ITE provision leading to Awarding Body qualifications in the lifelong learning/further education sector

Thank you for the help which your staff gave when I inspected your provision in the week beginning 16 January 2012. Please pass my thanks on to your staff for the time they gave to our discussions and for the information which they provided before and during the inspection.

The visit provided valuable information which will contribute to our national evaluation and to a published national overview report. This report will identify the overall quality of provision leading to Awarding Body qualifications and identify the overall strengths and areas for development. However, in line with previous practice, inspectors will not make graded judgements of the quality of the provision in each centre; they will evaluate and feed back identified strengths and any points for further development. These are outlined below for your centre.

The published overview report will list the names of the contributing institutions but individual institutions will not be identified in the main text.

Outcomes for trainees

Recruitment to the college's initial teacher education courses has fluctuated in recent years. Currently, 14 trainees are enrolled on the Preparation to Teach in the Lifelong Learning Sector (PTLLS) course. The first year of the Diploma in Teaching in the Lifelong Learning Sector (DTLLS) has recruited 18 trainees (including nine who started in January 2012), 12 of whom are college teachers. Some 26 trainees are enrolled on the second year of this course and ten of them work at the college. Trainees who are not college employees

work in a range of different settings, including work-based learning providers and local authorities. The college does not offer the Certificate in Teaching in the Lifelong Learning Sector (CTLLS).

While pass rates have been high on initial teacher education courses over the last three years, retention rates have been low on the DTLLS courses. Although improved in 2010/11, retention remains below the college's own target. Progression directly from PTLLS through to completion of DTLLS is low and this reflects the choices and employment paths of diverse cohorts of trainees. For professional or personal reasons, some trainees choose to delay enrolling on to the DTLLS course.

The team is reflective about the PTLLS and DTLLS provision and aware of some key strengths and areas for development. However, the quality systems in place focus primarily on retention and pass rates, choice of units and verifier reports. They give too little attention to how effective the programmes are in preparing trainees for a career in teaching.

Trainees are enthusiastic about the course and enjoy the sessions they attend. They extend their repertoire of teaching techniques as a consequence of what they learn on the PTLLS and DTLLS programmes and they become more reflective about their own practice. They plan lessons carefully and produce high quality resources. However, too often, the lesson objectives they identify are insufficiently challenging for the group of students they teach. Trainees make appropriate progress in improving their classroom management skills but not all are sufficiently competent in using questioning effectively to ascertain students' understanding of a topic, concept or process.

The majority of the trainees teach vocational subjects and they draw effectively in lessons on their own industrial and/or commercial experience. Not all trainees benefit from sufficient subject-specific support and this is particularly the case for those trainees who are not college employees.

Trainees value highly the swift and helpful support from the two teacher trainers. Feedback on observations is helpful in identifying trainees' strengths and areas for improvement but does not focus enough on the impact of teaching on students' achievement. As a result, trainees in their own evaluations do not reflect in sufficient depth on the extent to which their students are making at least the progress expected of them.

Trainers monitor trainees' progress routinely, both formally and informally, but the tracking focuses on completion of units and assignments and does not systematically review trainees' attainment.

The key strengths are:

- the confidence with which trainees use a wide range of teaching methods and activities in order to maintain students' interest
- trainees' empathy with, and support for, their own students
- the positive ways in which trainees draw on their own vocational experience to help to make lessons relevant to students
- peer support within each teacher training group, that trainees draw on very effectively to share ideas outside of class time
- well-structured, relevant and enjoyable teacher training sessions, skilfully delivered by trainers
- the swift and helpful support for trainees from the two teacher trainers
- the encouraging feedback on lesson observations and assignments that motivates trainees to succeed.

The key areas for development are:

- introducing a more systematic approach to the identification, assessment and tracking of trainees' progress in relation to their attainment
- focusing lesson observation feedback sharply on the impact of trainees' teaching on the achievement of their students
- encouraging trainees to reflect more specifically on the impact of their practice on the development of students' knowledge and skills
- ensuring that all trainees, including those who do not work at the college, benefit from comprehensive and rigorous subject-specialist support and feedback in order to improve their teaching
- improving trainees' questioning skills to ensure that when using question and answer as an assessment method, trainees do so with a level of sophistication that enables them to assess students' understanding of topics and concepts.

As explained in the inspection guidance, a copy of this letter will be published on the Ofsted website. It will also be available to the team for your next inspection.

Yours sincerely

Harriet Harper

Her Majesty's Inspector