



INSPECTION REPORT

Initial Teacher Training (Further Education)

University College Northampton

A 2004/05 Inspection

Managing Inspector: J E M Cohn, Additional Inspector

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BACKGROUND

1. This inspection was carried out in accordance with the Framework for the inspection of initial training of further education teachers and the guidance in the Handbook for the Inspection of initial training of further education teachers, both published in September 2004.

2. University College Northampton (UCN) has had a partnership arrangement with Northampton College and Peterborough Regional College for the delivery of in-service initial teacher training for teachers in further education for about ten years. The two colleges have developed their courses independently from each other in consultation with the University College. In the current year just under 100 trainees are on courses in the two colleges. Both courses are endorsed qualifications and satisfy the Secretary of State's requirements for further education teachers.

3. Northampton College offers a Certificate of Education programme, but Peterborough Regional College offers both a Certificate of Education and Post-Graduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) course. All the teaching and assessment is delivered wholly in the two colleges and is subject to the University College's quality assurance procedures.

THE INSPECTION

4. The inspection was carried out in two phases by three of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) and an inspector from the Adult Learning Inspectorate. A specialist additional inspector assisted with visits to observe trainees' teaching. Inspectors focused on the quality of training and management and quality assurance procedures during the first phase of the inspection. During the second phase, inspectors concentrated upon evaluating the achievements of the trainees through observing their teaching and evaluating their planning, assessment and coursework. Phase 2 of the inspection was completed in June 2005.

A EFFECTIVENESS OF PROVISION

5. The overall quality of provision is adequate (**grade 3**). Trainees achieve good standards overall in their practical teaching across the two colleges. They demonstrate a strong commitment to improving the achievements of their students, have a good rapport with them, and provide effective personal support and guidance. By the end of the course, the trainees' successfully use a variety of teaching methods to keep students interested and enthusiastic. The quality of the training programmes in the two colleges is generally good. Teacher trainers are generally well-qualified and have appropriate experience. They usually provide good models of teaching for their trainees. Nevertheless, insufficient attention is paid to the systematic development of trainees' specialist expertise across a portfolio of courses that they might be expected to teach. The monitoring and assessment of trainees' coursework is thorough and appropriate, including arrangements for external moderation. The arrangements for practical teaching are less satisfactory, with

insufficient specialist assessment and, until this year, no external moderation of end of course standards in practical teaching. University College, Northampton currently plays a limited role in the partnership, and this has mainly focused on the formal verification of standards achieved by trainees. This year, for the first time, the external examiner has observed trainees teach at the end of the course and so has verified standards in practical teaching.

KEY STRENGTHS

6. Inspectors identified the following strengths:

- trainees are strongly committed to the success of their students, their support and guidance is good and they achieve good standards in their practical teaching
- trainees plan, organise and manage their lessons well and use a broad range of teaching strategies effectively, including ICT
- trainees' assessment of students' work is generally good
- training programmes are well structured to help trainees progress in their learning
- the quality of teaching in training sessions is generally good and provides a model of good practice for trainees
- coursework effectively consolidates and develops further learning that takes place in teaching sessions
- the training programmes are managed well
- quality assurance procedures for coursework are thorough and appropriate.

AREAS FOR ATTENTION

7. The partnership should address:

- ways of improving trainees' medium-term planning and their use of target setting to aid progress in students' learning
- the need to increase specialist specific training and develop the role of mentors to support this
- ways of improving the quality of trainees' own action planning and target setting

- the need to improve the monitoring and assessment of practical teaching
- the extension of the partnership to include course development as well as quality assurance.

Further information on strengths and areas for attention is contained in the substantial sections of the report that follow.

B ACHIEVEMENTS OF TRAINEES

8. Trainees have high expectations of their students and are strongly committed to their progress and raising their levels of achievement. They are conscientious in their planning and evaluate their teaching carefully and perceptively in order to improve it. The great majority of trainees approach the course with diligence, but a few are reluctant to recognise the valuable staff development opportunities that the teacher training course offers.

9. Trainees demonstrate good and occasionally very good teaching. Trainees are well-qualified and have a good working knowledge of the courses that they teach. They are not as knowledgeable about related courses in their curriculum area. Many trainees identify students' preferred learning styles and take appropriate account of these in the teaching strategies that they use. Most trainees use a broad range of appropriate teaching strategies. These include teacher led and small group discussion, other small group and individually based activities, plenaries and lecturing. These strategies are usually carefully selected to meet the intended teaching objectives and effectively engage the interests of students.

10. Lessons are generally well planned and include clear teaching objectives. Longer term planning is more variable and some of it goes beyond the syllabus topics to be taught in individual lessons. Trainees display good pedagogical skills in the classroom. They provide clear and often interesting explanations. They use questioning well to explore ideas and test understanding, sometimes in small groups as well as in class discussion. Whiteboards and overhead projector transparencies are used competently and confidently. Where information and communication technology (ICT) is available it is used well, however some trainees have limited opportunities to use ICT in their teaching.

11. Lessons are well organised and managed. Some complex lessons, involving many activities are managed very well, so that the pace of learning and students' enthusiasm is sustained over long lessons. Sometimes, however, the pace slows during small group work where the activity is not structured well enough to meet fully the learning needs of all students.

12. Trainees generally use assessment well to provide constructive diagnostic feedback and judge progress in learning. Questioning during and at the end of lessons is used well. Comments on students' written work are usually positive and diagnostic, but do not always identify specific points for improvement. Occasionally trainees' marking is limited to brief comments and which can be cursory. Record-

keeping is usually thorough and follows closely the policy and practice of the relevant department.

13. The support and guidance that trainees provide the students is good, reflecting their commitment to the progress and achievement of their students.

C QUALITY OF TRAINING

14. The certificates of education and PGCE courses offered at the two colleges are part-time and modular over two years. Their content is closely matched against the FENTO standards and both qualifications are endorsed.

15. The training programmes are generally well constructed to build on the trainees' prior knowledge and experience, although the trainees report some repetition of subject material. They are not planned in the same systematic way to develop trainees' subject knowledge and subject specific pedagogical expertise. The arrangements for the accreditation of prior learning are satisfactory.

16. The great majority of tutors are well-qualified, but a small minority lack relevant higher-level qualifications. The quality of teaching is good overall and some is of a high quality. The best teaching is characterised by meticulous planning, a variety of well-planned teaching strategies, and sustained pace of learning together with the competent and confident use of ICT. Explanations are interesting, concise and very clear. Questioning is used to probe and consolidate learning effectively. Trainers effectively cater for all students. For example in a session on assessment, students benefited from each other's varying and diverse experiences. Trainers often ensure a continuing interaction between theory, the best pedagogical practice, and the trainees' own teaching experience. Trainees reported that they learned much from training of this quality and use it to improve their own practice.

17. Most of the teaching is well planned, effectively organised and well resourced. Explanations are clear and questioning is used well to test and consolidate understanding. Occasionally it does not challenge all the trainees fully, the pace of teaching and learning is slow and some teaching material repeats what students already know.

18. Both colleges have a mentor system, so that trainees can usually expect to be able to call on an experienced specialist in their area of expertise for support and guidance. Sometimes trainees do not have mentors or tutors with specialist expertise similar to their own. Generally, however, mentors provide helpful informal support and guidance to trainees about the courses and students that they teach, often giving of their own time to do this. This informal system of guidance and training frequently works well, but also leads to inconsistencies and a shortage of effective specialist guidance. Both colleges have recognised during the year the need to create a more formal and enhanced role for mentors in the training process, linked to agreed curriculum time to carry out this role.

19. The role of mentor is being increasingly developed. For example, in order to strengthen the links between specialist and generic aspects of the course, one

college is developing a system where clusters of mentors work closely with a course tutor who has broadly similar specialist expertise. Mentors will be formally trained for the role and will, in due course, be expected to gain a certificated qualification to become a mentor.

20. The identification of specific learning needs of individual trainees is not well developed. They are not effectively addressed through action planning and target setting. There is no formal audit of specialist expertise against the range and level of expertise that an experienced teacher in the trainee's specialist area might be expected to have. The systematic identification of areas of weakness is not well developed. For example, though trainees complete individual learning plans and identify targets for improvement, the learning plans often lack precision and targets are not focused sharply enough on exactly what trainees need to do make further progress in their learning.

21. Trainees' coursework is generally of good quality and plays an important role in consolidating or developing learning which has taken place in teaching sessions. It requires trainees to apply the principles and practice that they have been learning about to aspects of their own specialist practice, such as planning lessons or developing a study training package for a particular curriculum area. It also helps them to extend their understanding of their role as professional educators in the college in which they work and in the wider world of education.

22. The assessment of trainees' competence in the practical teaching of their specialist area is not effective. Much of this is done by course tutors who usually do not have specialist expertise in the area being taught. Mentors frequently provide helpful assessments of trainees' practical teaching, but are currently in a subsidiary role. In one college, mentors will take the lead role in monitoring and assessing the performance of trainees in the classroom next year and tutors will take on a quality assurance role.

D MANAGEMENT AND QUALITY ASSURANCE OF PROVISION

23. The procedures to recruit and select suitable trainees are well organised, appropriate and inclusive. The courses are advertised locally and on the college web sites. Recruitment from minority ethnic groups is encouraged through regular college contacts.

24. Leadership and management of the course programmes is good overall. Course leaders know their tutor teams well and work closely with them to ensure that they have a clear understanding of their responsibilities. They are responsive to change and have responded rapidly and thoughtfully to issues raised during the inspection, particularly related to an enhanced role for mentors. This has included combining observations for teacher training and internal assessment purposes and increasing significantly the number of observations of sessions.

25. Accommodation and hardware resources to support teaching are satisfactory. Paper and electronically based resources are adequate, and UCN provides access

to its library. However it does not have a specialist further education section to supplement the provision, or support staff in the colleges.

26. The partnership arrangements between UCN and individual colleges are limited. UCN sends a college representative to board of study meetings. Colleges lack specialist advice for revalidation of their courses. An external examiner visits both colleges, but reports separately on the provision in each. This reflects the current nature of the partnership agreement, with the UCN having a limited validation role, but no role in course development. The university is currently reassessing the nature of the partnership and has appointed a consultant who is a further education teacher training specialist, who will in future work with both colleges on developing new provision.

27. Quality assurance procedures to ensure consistent judgements about trainees' coursework are clear and appropriate within each college. The external examiner ensures consistency of judgements across the two colleges.

28. Quality assurance procedures to ensure consistent judgements about trainees' practical teaching through internal moderation include some joint observations and discussions about standards achieved, but lack sufficient specialist input from mentors. Until this year there was no external moderation of practical teaching at the end of the course. This year the situation has changed and the external examiner has seen a sample of trainees teach at the end of the course, but further work is necessary to improve the quality assurance procedures related to judgements about the standards that trainees achieve in their practical teaching.