



INSPECTION REPORT

Initial Teacher Training (Further Education)

University of Bolton Consortium

A 2004/05 Inspection

Managing Inspector: C Baker, 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. The University of Bolton works in partnership with six colleges to provide initial teacher training (ITT) courses for further education (FE) teachers and other trainers from the post-compulsory sector, leading to the university's postgraduate (PGCE) and certificate of education (Cert. Ed.) qualifications. Both are endorsed qualifications and satisfy the Secretary of State's requirements for FE teachers. Two training routes are available: a full-time pre-service course, on which there are 282 trainees, including 81 following a Skills for Life pathway, and a part-time in-service route, on which there are 470 trainees, including 66 following a Skills for Life pathway.

3. The pre-service course lasts for one academic year. After the first half term, full-time pre-service trainees spend two days a week on placement throughout the following two terms, normally in one work context. The in-service course usually lasts for two academic years. Trainees who have a level 4 National Awarding Body, endorsed, FE, teaching qualification are able to transfer into the second year of the Certificate of Education course through a formal accreditation of prior learning procedure.

4. The pre-service course is taught in two modes: a shared delivery mode in which partner colleges provide three education studies modules and the university provides three subject-focused curriculum modules; and a mode in which either the university or, increasingly, individual partner colleges provide all modules. In the university-provided pre-service Skills for Life pathway all modules have a specialist focus. Partner colleges are largely responsible for assessing the teaching of pre-service trainees placed in them; the university makes one assessment visit. Partner colleges are largely responsible for delivering in-service training and wholly responsible for assessing the teaching of in-service trainees.

THE INSPECTION

5. The inspection was carried out in two phases by an inspection team including additional inspectors, a full-time inspector from the Adult Learning Inspectorate and a member of Her Majesty's Inspectorate. Pre-service provision at the university, including the Skills for Life pathway, and both pre-service and in-service provision at two colleges were evaluated as part of the inspection. During the first phase, which took place in February 2005, Inspectors focussed on the quality of training and management and quality assurance procedures; and, during the second phase, inspectors concentrated on the achievements of FE trainees, through observing their teaching and gathering evidence of their progress during the course. Phase 2 of the inspection was completed in July 2005.

A EFFECTIVENESS OF PROVISION

6. The overall quality of provision is adequate (**grade 3**). The partnership has introduced substantial improvements over the last two years. The great majority of in-service and pre-service trainees demonstrate good levels of skill in planning, teaching and assessment and draw on their prior occupational and life experience to enliven their teaching. With very few exceptions, trainees gain in confidence and competence over the course. However, many pay insufficient attention to evaluating the impact of their teaching in promoting students' learning. Trainees benefit from high quality and challenging taught sessions, strong personal and academic tutoring and effective assessment, but work-based opportunities and mentoring support are too variable to ensure that they achieve the highest levels of competence. Strategic leadership and operational management are under developed, constraining a partnership-wide approach to development and improvement. Although a wide range of quality assurance arrangements are now in place, a number are not yet fully established and the effective monitoring of work-based experience cannot be achieved effectively without more precisely documented expectations.

KEY STRENGTHS

7. Inspectors identified the following strengths:
- high calibre of trainees recruited onto the courses and the good progress they make
 - a strong emphasis on integrating theoretical constructs with practical teaching skills in both the content and assessment of modules
 - high quality of training sessions and individual tutorials provided by the teacher-educators on both pre and in-service courses
 - development of the subject expertise of pre-service trainees through curriculum modules, and of all trainees through the introduction of subject mentoring
 - increasingly effective procedures for assessing and moderating trainees' teaching and in-course assignments
 - a firm focus on improving training programmes.

AREAS FOR ATTENTION

8. Inspectors identified the following areas for attention:

- plateauing in the development of capable trainees whose progress is constrained by a lack of structured training and challenge in the work place
- variability across the partnership in identifying and meeting trainees' needs in literacy, numeracy and, to some extent information and communication technology (ICT)
- a lack of formal attention to identifying and meeting trainees' subject knowledge needs, particularly in the case of pre-service trainees
- limited progress in embedding literacy and numeracy requirements in provision across the partnership
- reliance on local and often voluntary systems of mentor support, and a lack of clearly defined expectations about trainee entitlement or mentor responsibilities, leading to inconsistencies in subject support and mentor contributions to assessment and hindering the development of effective monitoring and intervention
- under-developed strategic leadership and operational management across the partnership resulting in slow progress in implementing consistent and coherent partnership-wide improvements and exploiting fully the partnership's potential.

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

B ACHIEVEMENTS OF TRAINEES

9. Trainees come from a wide range of backgrounds and experience. Over the course, the very great majority grow in confidence and make substantial progress in their teaching capability. All the trainees observed demonstrated at least a satisfactory level of teaching competence and the great majority achieved a good level. However, no lessons were judged to be very good.

10. Throughout their work, the great majority of trainees demonstrate highly professional conduct, values and attitudes and a clear commitment to raising the achievement of students. Almost all are utterly reliable and act very responsibly. As far as possible, they play a full part in the wider life of the college, contribute to departmental meetings and professional discussion, and share their own resources with the department.

11. Trainees are critically analytical. Not only do they have an overall grasp of their progress and key areas for their development, but they are determined to extend their expertise and keen to seek and act on advice.

Teaching and learning is adjusted effectively in the light of student responses. In one revision lesson, when students began to lose interest, the trainee quickly replaced an initially motivating group-based snakes and ladders game by a second stimulating game which involved all students more consistently. While most trainees adapt future planning and teaching in the light of their analyses of teaching and learning, a number of formal written lesson evaluations are too brief, incomplete or fail to give sufficient attention to what students have learnt and why and the implications of this for future teaching.

12. Trainees are well qualified, have suitable professional experience and extend their subject expertise thoroughly in any area of initial uncertainty. During lessons, they employ their expertise to very good effect, often grounding teaching in occupational contexts. As a result, students extend their knowledge, understanding and skills.

13. Normally planning is very thorough and gives detailed attention to aims and specific, sometimes differentiated, learning objectives. Teaching methods and resources, as well as learning activities, are chosen thoughtfully to implement these objectives. The best planning gives very careful attention to the varied needs of each student group and integrates highly pertinent assessment. A minority of planning lacks detail, fails to update lesson plans, or gives limited or no attention to meeting individuals' needs.

14. In their teaching, most trainees employ a wide and imaginative range of well chosen methods and forms of classroom organisation. The majority make effective use of a suitable variety of resources, including very well presented and relevant information and task sheets, polished Power-Point and overhead transparency presentations, and carefully selected video clips. In one lesson observed, an excellent short reference handbook, produced by the trainee, supported students in writing reports and compiling portfolios. However, in a minority of cases, insufficient use is made of ICT. Communication between trainees and students is generally effective. Demonstrations are well structured and explanations are articulate.

15. Over the course, trainees have generally become skilful in organising classrooms and workshops and in managing behaviour. They have developed productive relationships with students. Most are now competent in engaging students actively in their learning, organising productive group work, dealing with challenging behaviour, and facilitating smooth transitions between teaching and learning episodes. They are alert to health and safety considerations.

16. Most trainees are well informed about the purposes of assessment, about types of assessment and about the range of course specifications relevant to their specialism. They have a clear grasp of requirements and are becoming skilful at applying expectations to written and practical assessments. Marking is usually detailed and constructive, identifying significant strengths and areas for improvement clearly. In a minority of cases, assessment skills are not well established and trainees utilise a limited range of assessment methods.

17. Generally, student progress is monitored effectively throughout lessons. Trainees circulate during individual and group work to check understanding, clarify tasks and move students on. Feedback is sensitive, including to students who have previously experienced failure. A majority of trainees are skilful in helping students support each other. Tutorials are prepared carefully with a tight focus. Normally, questioning during monitoring and in plenaries is structured carefully, probing learning and providing clues to extend students' expertise. However, a minority of trainees fail to monitor and intervene sufficiently effectively to enhance students' progress.

18. Student attainment is usually recorded with care. Not only do trainees maintain simple college-based records of attendance and assessment marks, a number of those observed are beginning to develop more sophisticated approaches to recording progress. One makes a written note of the progress of each student during every lesson; another has devised a form for recording practical assessments as a basis for individual feedback; two have developed appropriate self assessment records for students. Occasionally recording is ineffective.

19. The majority of trainees are highly supportive of students. They take a real interest in those they teach and know them well. Most are well informed about, and sensitive to, students' needs and potential, including in ESOL groups and take these needs into account in planning and teaching, for instance through the use of focused questions, additional support, differentiated resources and activities, grouping by ability or open-ended tasks. Highly specific learning needs are tackled appropriately, as where a trainee began to employ coloured paper and Arial font to support a dyslexic student. Most trainees also plan formal opportunities for individualised support and feedback. However, during their teaching, a minority fails to match provision to the full range of student progress and achievement.

C QUALITY OF TRAINING

20. The courses are well designed, mapped against the FENTO standards and, in the Skills for Life pathway, meet the specialist requirements for the training of teachers of numeracy, literacy and ESOL. Pre-service provision includes a strong subject focus which makes a very effective contribution to the development of subject-specific teaching skills. In-service provision takes a more general approach throughout.

21. The content of courses is well chosen and gives close early attention to preparing trainees to plan, teach and assess effectively and to integrating work place experiences with the taught course. However, literacy and numeracy requirements are not yet embedded firmly in provision across all partners. Pre-service trainees perceive repetition and some mixed messages between the content covered in the university and in some colleges. Assignments are relevant, demanding and imaginative, requiring trainees to

interrogate practice in the light of reading. They contribute very effectively to developing trainees' knowledge and skills.

22. All the training observed, including tutorials, was of good or very good quality, with a strong focus on specialist subject expertise particularly in pre-service curriculum modules on the generic pathway and all modules in the Skills for Life pathway. Tutors are well qualified with a good breadth of professional and academic experience, boosted recently by new appointments to take the Skills for Life provision forward. Sessions are lively and stimulating and demonstrate key characteristics of effective teaching. They are planned meticulously, include a wide variety of pertinent methods and resources, draw heavily on practice, engage trainees skilfully in analytical discussion and challenge and extend their professional expertise.

23. The great majority of trainees engage fully with training. They contribute effectively to taught sessions, undertake further research and reading, in particular when undertaking assignments, and apply theoretical constructs to practice in order to improve pedagogy. The training sessions observed resulted in clear gains in trainees' expertise. Mentors remarked on the high level of specialist subject competence possessed by pre-service trainees at an early stage in the placement.

24. The work places visited provided very suitable teaching and observation opportunities. However, a minority of trainees fare less well. They have insufficient opportunities to plan, teach and assess across a wide enough range of levels, course specifications and learner groupings or to observe a sufficient range of other teachers throughout the training; the timing of some pre-service placements limits opportunities to participate in the wider life of the department or placement; and, in some cases, the teaching responsibilities of pre-service trainees are not well matched to their progress.

25. The partnership is committed to developing subject mentoring. On both pre and in-service courses, trainees are now expected to have a mentor. Mentors and other college tutors provide trainees with very substantial support, including, for pre-service trainees, induction into college procedures, joint planning, observation of teaching, help with selecting and creating resources, moderation and analysis of marking, and detailed guidance on how to tackle areas for development. However, the range and quality of subject mentoring remains patchy. A minority of trainees has no named mentor. The role is voluntary and rarely attracts time or payment. Mentors are not required to undertake training for the task and attendance at training events is limited by the widespread nature of pre-service placements. The high number of new pre-service placements required annually provides a training challenge. Expectations about trainee entitlements and mentor responsibilities are not yet sufficiently specific and mentor practices are informal and too variable. Moreover, there is no structural coherence between taught programmes and the work place. Mentors are unfamiliar with the taught programme and lack any expectation that they might have a formal role in consolidating what is learnt centrally. With relatively limited documented expectations about trainee entitlements and the mentor role, sharp monitoring of, and reliable

judgements about, the effectiveness of placement-based provision cannot be achieved.

26. On both pre and in-service courses, considerable attention is given to meeting the individual needs of trainees. Formal and informal personal and academic tutoring is usually very effective in helping them to analyse practice and tackle concerns. Trainees value the highly responsive and constructive support they receive. Moreover, the pilot procedures introduced recently to improve the formal tracking and enhancement of trainee progress across all elements of training have been employed increasingly constructively throughout the year. However, approaches to screening, developing and tracking trainees' competence in literacy, numeracy and, to some extent, ICT, are inconsistent across the partnership and of variable effectiveness, and there are no formal arrangements for auditing and enhancing subject and occupational expertise.

27. Most formal feedback to individual trainees is highly focused and productive. Written assessments of teaching are usually very detailed, take account of prompts in assessment templates, include precise references to subject-specific features of teaching and identify strengths and action points clearly. They are accompanied by substantial oral discussion. Trainees benefit markedly from these formal observations. The impact is particularly significant where action points become the focus for further support and form the basis of the next observation. Most feedback on assignments is equally constructive. Assignments are marked and returned rapidly. The most useful marking includes pertinent annotations, alerting trainees to omissions, errors – including in grammar and spelling - and additional reading, and sets clear targets for development. Trainees also benefit from detailed comments on draft or referred assignments. A minority of feedback is less helpful. Occasionally, written assessments of teaching take little account of subject pedagogy or fail to summarise strengths and targets; and marking of assignments is too brief and lacks a focus on improvement.

28. Assessment procedures are generally appropriate. The assessment guide is clear and informative, and roles are mostly well defined. Assignment briefs are explicit and criteria are suitable and generally applied with care. The assessment of work-based experience has developed to include six assessments by approved assessors who are supported in the task by written and oral guidance. Account is taken of subject expertise: at least one subject specialist assessment is required and the end-of placement report is completed by the subject mentor. In the Skills for Life pathway every assessment is by a specialist. However, in a number of cases initial assessment visits came too late to allow intervention at an early enough stage, the role of the mentor in assessment is not yet well documented or entirely clear, and the level of detail and specificity in mentor reports was variable, rarely providing a full enough picture of competence in teaching the subject or identifying clear enough targets to inform further professional development.

29. Judgements on assignments and teaching competence are accurate at the boundary between pass and refer or fail. Formal and informal procedures to deal with trainees at risk of failing operate effectively.

D MANAGEMENT AND QUALITY ASSURANCE OF PROVISION

30. Attention is given to the recruitment and retention of pre-service trainees from under-represented groups, through local promotional activity, the university web-site, and inclusive publicity. However, the recruitment, selection, and progress of such trainees is not monitored consistently across the partnership. Nevertheless, a recent analysis of recruitment data has resulted in suitable action points, related, for instance, to increasing the number of trainees with disabilities and further scrutiny of reasons for withdrawals.

31. Generally, applicants are well informed about course provision through helpful written information about pathways, and, in the case of pre-service applicants, curriculum fact sheets and written details about the selection process. Pre-service Skills for Life trainees also benefit from group information sessions as part of the interview.

32. Selection arrangements have already been revised and are being revised further to become more rigorous and give additional time to providing information, probing needs and identifying applicants' concerns. All trainees are interviewed, in-service trainees locally and pre-service trainees by the university. In the case of pre-service trainees, sifting and interviewing processes are beginning to take some account of subject expertise through the use of subject specialist staff and the application of curriculum-specific expectations. Records of interviews include the reasons why any candidate is unsuccessful. The most useful are carefully detailed, give suitable attention to relevant occupational experience, and indicate any conditions. Other records fail to make clear how well applicants have met the specified criteria, give limited attention to serious weaknesses and provide insufficient evidence to inform focused pre-course preparation, the early compilation of individual learning plans or any necessary adjustments to planned provision. As a result, this year, the achievements and progress of a small number of pre-service trainees was affected adversely.

33. In the case of in-service provision, there is increasingly effective liaison within employing colleges between ITT and human resource management departments, although in-service trainees in full-time employment have no time allocated routinely to attend training.

34. Selection procedures are mostly effective in identifying suitable trainees. Retention and pass rates are generally high; trainees are suitably qualified and experienced and their achievements by the end of training are overall good; and there is some evidence that staff trained on the in-service route are improving the quality of teaching in their departments. Many pre-service trainees gain posts in their placement.

35. The partnership recognises the importance of effective leadership and management arrangements. University management and committee structures have been reviewed systematically and revised carefully, partly to clarify partnership responsibilities and lines of communication. Clearly defined partnership agreements include up-to-date and transparent information on funding allocations.

36. However, strategic leadership and operational effectiveness are not yet well established. In the face of the prolonged absence of key managers, other senior staff have taken over partnership-wide responsibilities. Underdeveloped strategic leadership is demonstrated in limited cross partnership collaborative structures, inconsistent approaches to key policies and practices, for instance related to equal opportunities, and delayed responses to national requirements; underdeveloped operational effectiveness is demonstrated by insufficient partnership-wide professional development opportunities, limited partnership-wide action planning, a failure to exploit fully staff expertise and good practice from across the partnership and some ineffective communication, particularly about where responsibility for driving forward key developments lies. By contrast, leadership at pathway and in-house team level is very strong. In-house course teams plan together very effectively, and, in the university, scheduled cross pathway discussion has now been introduced.

37. Course documentation is clear, detailed and supportive, and is circulated to all involved in training. It includes generally effective outlines of most key roles and responsibilities. Accommodation and resources are at least adequate and, in the partner colleges visited, improving. Good support in extending ICT expertise is available to all trainees through the University Learning Support and Development Centre. The centre also provides remote access to a full range of e-journals.

38. The partnership has in place a range of improving arrangements to assure the quality of provision. Robust quinquennial reviews involve all partners. Validation arrangements, including for the validation of partner colleges, are thorough. There are rigorous procedures for the internal moderation of assignments and external moderation by examiners. A partnership-wide approach is now being taken to annual review. Timely and constructive annual reviews by each partner, though not yet consistent in format, feed into partnership reviews which are interrogated carefully by appropriate university committees.

39. However, partnership-wide internal moderation procedures for assignments were not applied strictly in 2004-05 in the case of in-service provision, and are not yet fully developed in relation to the assessment of teaching in the case of both pre and in-service programmes. Moreover, the routine monitoring of work-based experience is not well established and is difficult to achieve without clearly documented and agreed minimum expectations. Assuring the consistency and quality of partner college

provision is only just being addressed, for instance through recently negotiated peer review arrangements.

40. The partnership demonstrates a strong commitment to continuous improvement. Tutors respond rapidly to concerns raised by trainees, including about their placement. An electronic data base is already helping managers to log and track progress in addressing issues identified from a wide range of sources, including external examiners and inspection. The great majority of the areas for attention identified during the inspection came as no surprise and potentially effective changes are already under consideration or in hand. For instance, planned changes to the pre-service course structure, taking effect in September 2005, address a number of significant areas for attention noted at the end of the first phase of the inspection, including delayed placements, insufficient use of the first few weeks of training, and inadequate early attention to behaviour management or to the 14-19 curriculum.