



INSPECTION REPORT

Initial Teacher Training (Further Education)

University of Wolverhampton Partnership

A 2004/05 Inspection

Managing Inspector: P Pullen HMI

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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 Wolverhampton works in partnership with 11 colleges across the West Midlands to provide initial teacher training courses (ITT) courses for in service post-compulsory education and training. The partnership is well-established, with plans for it to be extended to include two further colleges over the next 12 months. There are two training routes available. A full-time, pre-service route, offered only at the university, leading to the Post Graduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) award and part-time, in-service provision, leading to the Certificate in Education (Cert Ed) award. Both are endorsed qualifications and satisfy the Secretary of State's requirements for further education (FE) teachers. In addition to these generic qualifications, the university also offers specialist skills pathways for teachers of adult literacy, adult numeracy and English as a second language (ESOL) leading to both PGCE and Cert Ed awards. The generic Cert Ed award is offered at all 11 partner colleges but not at the university.

3. The PGCE programme lasts for one academic year and is taught in modules, two of which are common to the generic and skills routes. The Cert Ed programme is also modular and lasts for two academic years. Both programmes are assessed, in part, via a portfolio of evidence.

4. All generic Cert Ed modules are taught and assessed by college staff, subject to the university's quality assurance procedures. The PGCE and specialist Cert Ed courses are taught by university staff from the department of post-compulsory education and training (PCET)

THE INSPECTION

5. The inspection was carried out in two phases by Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI), supported by a full-time inspector from the Adult Learning Inspectorate and specialist additional inspectors. Pre-service and in-service provision at the university and in-service provision at three colleges were evaluated as part of the inspection. Inspectors focussed on the quality of training and management and quality assurance procedures during the first phase, which took place in February 2005. During the second phase, inspectors concentrated upon evaluating 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 good (**grade 2**). Both pre-service and in-service trainees reach a good level of teaching competence. They demonstrate high levels of commitment to teaching in the learning and skills sector and to raising students' achievements. Most trainees have a good knowledge of their subject or vocational area and make effective use of reflection and evaluation to develop teaching skills. Programmes are coherent and effectively co-ordinated across the partnership. They are underpinned by a strong and effective emphasis on developing reflective practice. Although some trainers at both the university and partner colleges provide good role models for their trainees there are some inconsistencies in the quality of training sessions. Trainees are well supported by their personal and academic tutors and receive very effective feedback on their progress. There are variations in the quality of subject-specific support for trainees. Recruitment and selection processes are thorough and effective. The partnership is well managed. Roles and responsibilities are clear and there is regular contact between the university and partner colleges. Resource provision is generally good. Assessment procedures are accurate and consistent. Systematic course review processes are in place and enable staff to respond well to issues raised by trainees. However, insufficient quality assurance measures are taken to ensure the consistency of training delivery across the partnership.

KEY STRENGTHS

7. Inspectors identified the following strengths:

- trainees' high levels of commitment to teaching in the learning and skills sector and to raising students' achievements
- effective use of reflection and evaluation by the majority of trainees to develop their teaching skills
- trainees who provide good levels of support for their students and produce lessons that are well-planned and well-matched to students' needs
- high quality feedback on trainees' progress by trainers and mentors
- robust quality of assessment systems
- well-established and effective partnership arrangements contributing to the needs of the local learning and skills community
- well established and effective systems for course review
- effective mentor training and support within the partnership.

AREAS FOR ATTENTION

- inconsistencies in the quality of training sessions across the partnership
- variations in the quality of subject-specific support for trainees
- insufficient quality assurance measures to ensure consistency of training delivery across the partnership.

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

B ACHIEVEMENT OF TRAINEES

8. Trainees are strongly committed to raising students' achievement and have a good understanding of the variety of learning needs of the students they teach. They are professional in their approach and involve themselves well in all aspects of the work of the colleges in which they are employed or are placed.

9. Most trainees demonstrate the ability to reflect on their own practice in order to develop and enhance their practical teaching skills. They make good use of the feedback from teaching observations, assignments and reviews from the courses they teach to inform their action plans.

10. Trainees generally demonstrate a good knowledge of their subject or vocational area. They develop good relationships with their students and are able to draw on their vocational experiences to make learning more realistic. A suitable range of teaching strategies is used to involve students in well-directed, whole-class activities; trainees support students well on an individual basis.

11. Most trainees manage the learning environment well. Questioning techniques are used effectively with careful use of direct and targeted questions as appropriate. Well-designed handouts that make good use of colour and graphics are used to interest students. In some lessons, there is a need for the use of a greater variety of media, such as information and communications technology (ICT) and a broader range of activities to match students' varied learning styles. A small minority of trainees are not sufficiently directive in their approach; consequently, the students in their classes are slower to settle down to work.

12. The majority of trainees use a suitable range of assessment and monitoring strategies and build these into the planning of their teaching. There is good tracking of students' progress and effective marking of their work. Trainees make use of assessment particularly well to note the advancements that students make where this is appropriate. All trainees

make good use of their knowledge of students' prior attainment. Virtually all trainees record their students' progress in good detail and use this information to plan lessons to meet their individual needs.

C QUALITY OF TRAINING

13. Programmes are coherent and designed well to support the development of professional skills and competences. They meet the Further Education National Training Organisation (FENTO) standards and the Secretary of State's requirements for FE teachers. The generic programme comprises four modules, two of which are sequential and address teaching practice and reflection on theory and practice. The other two modules have a specialist or curriculum focus and run the whole year. For the literacy, numeracy and ESOL specialist routes, trainees complete the two sequential core modules and two subject specialist modules.

14. The partnership has a strong commitment to meeting regional and sector needs. The provision has been adapted significantly over the last year to meet the changing focus on initial teacher training as it moves towards a more subject based and specialist focus. The introduction, by the university, of three optional subject specific pathways in literacy, numeracy and ESOL is particularly innovative and responsive.

15. Programme delivery is well managed and effectively co-ordinated. Partner colleges meet regularly at the university and there is particularly good liaison between the university's link tutors and the colleges' teacher training teams. Comprehensive module handbooks contain clear specifications of assessment requirements and an indication of weekly associated tasks such as reading and diary entries. Modules are evaluated and updated regularly after good consultation with both staff and trainees.

16. The principles of reflective practice, combined with an emphasis on teaching as a research-based profession, underpin all aspects of the programmes. Trainees are constantly encouraged to reflect on their teaching and learning experiences with the use of clearly designed, and developmental, set tasks. There is a strong emphasis on the application of theory to the workplace setting of the trainee. The use of information and learning technology (ILT) is integrated well into the modules. Trainees are required to provide evidence of ILT use in their portfolios. Good opportunities are provided for trainees to reflect on their own teaching and that of their peers. Trainees are required to undertake a minimum of six peer observations but they often do many more. The variety of formats for recording their observations encourages trainees to focus well on different aspects of teaching and learning.

17. Programmes are effectively designed to develop the generic teaching skills common to all subjects. However, curriculum specifications do not give sufficient emphasis to the development of subject-specific teaching skills. The partnership recognises this issue and some innovative attempts are being

made to develop other ways of providing trainees with subject specific support. For example, the university is collaborating with other higher education institutions to develop on-line subject support materials and is intending to appoint subject associate tutors to work on-line to support trainees.

18. Teaching teams are well qualified and experienced. Tutors in the university and the partner colleges have clearly defined roles. Most lecturers in the university are engaged in research, which has a pedagogic focus. In colleges, some trainers also work in other vocational areas of the college, thereby helping to ensure that the team is up-to-date with the current needs of FE staff, and extending the expertise of the team.

19. There are some inconsistencies in the quality of teaching across the partnership. In the best sessions, trainers at both the colleges and the university provide good exemplars for their trainees in terms of the planning and delivery of learning, use of innovative techniques, engagement of learners and attention to individual learning needs. Trainers generally draw well on trainees' own experiences and challenge them to deepen their understanding. A few sessions, however, were characterised by a lack of clear planning, insufficient engagement of trainees and rather pedestrian delivery. Modelling the use of ILT to support learning, other than trainee internet searches was also limited in college-based provision.

20. Clear systems are in place to record and evaluate trainees' prior experience. Trainees take diagnostic tests to identify their key skills levels in literacy and numeracy. They also complete a comprehensive self-audit to assess levels of competence in information and communication technology (ICT). The outcomes of these audits are recorded in action plans, which are regularly reviewed by personal and academic tutors. Action plans are effective in helping trainees focus on their individual areas for development because they are required to identify the actions they will take to meet their objectives, identify the evidence they will need to indicate success and also to set a target date for completion.

21. Trainees receive effective personal and academic tutorial support. Reviews of trainees' progress are completed at regular intervals. They include records of all trainees' lesson observations, the professional reports completed by college mentors and records of tutorials and mentor meetings. Trainees are encouraged to reflect on their achievements at key points on the training year and to set negotiated targets for their development. Good systems are in place to enable tutors to identify trainees who are giving cause for concern or who are at risk of failure.

22. All pre-service trainees are allocated a mentor by the placement co-ordinator in their placement college. Appropriately, qualified mentors are matched to trainees according to published criteria. The university works hard to ensure that mentors for pre-service trainees have the appropriate level of teaching experience. However, the requirement for subject expertise is secondary to the aim of ensuring that all trainees have the support of a well-

qualified mentor. As a consequence, not all trainees are receiving subject specific guidance in their placement colleges.

23. Mentors in colleges play an important role in working with in-service trainees to develop their classroom practice and in assessing their progress whilst on supervised teaching experience. Partner colleges have taken significant steps to improve the level of mentor support provided for in-service trainees. However, the quality of mentor support received by individual trainees across the partnership is variable. In the best examples, trainees have experienced supportive, specialist mentors, some of whom have advanced practitioner status within their college. In other cases, mentors' workloads prevent them from giving sufficient support to trainees.

24. Feedback from tutors, on trainees' teaching and other assessed work, is very thorough and provides trainees with clear indications on how to improve their performance. Close attention is paid to the setting of developmental targets with trainees at key points in the training year. They find the feedback both motivating and helpful in developing their practice and knowledge. Feedback is clearly related to expectations of good practice but only in some instances enables trainees to identify their progress against the FENTO standards. In a few instances, where students' work is clearly of a pass standard, feedback on marked work is not sufficiently geared towards identifying how trainees could make further progress.

25. There is careful and effective assessment of classroom practice. In-service trainees on the Cert. Ed are formally observed on three occasions each academic year, by members of the teacher education team and by their mentors. At least one joint observation is undertaken. PGCE trainees are formally observed six times. Assessment of teaching is part of a professional practice module in each year of the Cert Ed programme and as part of the reflective practitioner and developing reflective practice modules of the PGCE. A fail is awarded if one or more criteria are not achieved. Tutors instigate a rigorous 'retrieval' system for any trainees who fail an assessed observation. This involves informal support, observation of teaching practice, and feedback, before the scheduling of a formal, assessed observation.

D MANAGEMENT AND QUALITY OF PROVISION

26. Effective steps have been taken by all partners to develop a more rigorous approach to the recruitment and selection of trainees. Thorough processes are in place to select candidates to the programmes and to ensure that applicants meet the necessary requirements of the course. Trainees across the partnership receive a good level of information and guidance prior to selection of an appropriate route. The quality of trainees recruited to the pre-service programme is particularly high and includes significant numbers of trainees from minority ethnic backgrounds.

27. Leadership and management of the partnership are good. Partner colleges and the university have a collective commitment to improving the

quality of teaching and learning across the sector in the west midlands. Roles and responsibilities within the partnership are clear, transparent and well documented. There is regular and effective formal and informal contact between university and partner college staff. University link tutors and personal tutors liaise particularly closely with college staff responsible for teacher training.

28. Resources across the partnership are generally good. The university library is well stocked and has flexible opening hours to meet the needs of the students. Learning resource centres in partner colleges provide an adequate supply of resources to support learning. Although reference copies are held of the core texts, some trainees in colleges reported difficulties in gaining access to loan copies. The university's virtual learning environment (VLE) can be used by Cert Ed trainees in colleges to support their learning. Partner colleges are taking steps to integrate resources available for staff development more closely with initial teacher training provision.

29. Course review processes are systematic, thorough and well documented, with clear action points identified and taken forward. Good use is made of external examiners' reports to set agendas for improvement. Staff-student consultative committees provide a very effective means of gaining student feedback. Well-considered actions are identified in response to this feedback and it feeds into the annual review process. However, there are insufficient quality assurance measures to ensure the consistency of training delivery across the partnership.

30. Assessment procedures are accurate and consistent. There are robust systems for the internal verification of written assessments, which provide detailed feedback to assessors. A shared understanding of what constitutes a pass and a fail has been established through cross marking and team discussion. Careful consideration is given to borderline pass/fail assessments. Tutors receive detailed guidance on the marking of assignments. Assessment decisions for the in-service programme are made collaboratively between trainers and mentors.

31. The partnership is developing very good systems of mentor training and support. Mentors in all franchised colleges and placement colleges receive detailed guidance on their roles, including overviews of assessment criteria for lesson observations, procedures for trainees 'at risk' of failure and relevant forms. Additional support is also provided through the university's recently developed web portfolio for mentors. Training programmes, delivered at both the university and at colleges, are proving effective in enabling new mentors to understand their roles and to develop appropriate skills. A postgraduate certificate in mentoring has also recently been introduced by the university.

32. Comprehensive and thorough annual monitoring reports are produced for all programmes and lead to the development of action plans for improvement. Data on recruitment are collected and analysed in terms of gender and ethnicity but, in general, these are not used to monitor the

provision or set targets. Although the content of training programmes emphasise clear principles of equality of opportunity there is no systematic monitoring across the partnership of whether training programmes promote good race relations and equality of opportunity.