

Further Education Teacher Training
Manchester Metropolitan University

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Inspection report
2005/06

Managing Inspector:
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The inspection

1. The inspection was carried out in two phases by Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI), supported by specialist additional inspectors and a full-time inspector from the Adult Learning Inspectorate (ALI). Inspectors focussed on the quality of training and on management and quality assurance during the first phase, which took place in November 2005. During the second phase, inspectors concentrated upon evaluating the achievements of trainees through observing their teaching and gathering evidence of their progress during the course. Phase two of the inspection was completed in June 2006

Background

2. This inspection was carried out in accordance with the framework for the inspection of initial training for further education teachers and the guidance in the handbook for the inspection of initial teacher training of further education teachers, both published in September 2004

3. Manchester Metropolitan University currently works in partnership with nine further education (FE) colleges providing in-service training for teachers and trainers across the post-compulsory sector. At the time of the inspection, the pre-service course, normally offered at the university, had been withdrawn due to unresolved staffing difficulties. At the partner colleges, some 672 in-service trainees were enrolled on courses leading to the university validated post-graduate certificate in education (PGCE) or certificate in education (Cert. Ed). Approximately half of these trainees teach in FE colleges. The awards satisfy the Secretary of State's requirements for FE teachers.

4. College-based in-service courses are designed for part-time attendance, on one day each week over two years. Trainees who have already gained a national awarding body qualification, for example, the City and Guilds Further Education Teaching Certificate (7407 Stage 2), gain advanced standing and are able to progress directly into the second year of the course.

Effectiveness of provision

5. The overall quality of provision is adequate (grade 3). Trainees are effectively introduced to generic and theoretical aspects of teaching; although the specialist aspects of teacher training, such as mentor arrangements, are not well-developed. The provision has a strong focus on inclusive practice. This is valued by trainees and reflected in their lessons. Most of them make satisfactory or better progress but they are least skilful at matching learning activities to students' individual learning needs. Some trainees have a narrow teaching practice experience. Teacher trainers give good personal support but progress reviews lack focus. Trainees' reflections and feedback on their progress are not used systematically by trainees and trainers, together, to identify trainees' professional development needs. Course managers are aware of the strengths and weaknesses of the provision. The recently

appointed leadership team is making changes to bring about improvements but these are at an early stage of implementation.

Key strengths

Inspectors identified the following strengths:

- trainees who are well motivated and professional, receptive to advice and committed to improving their skills
- good integration of theory and practice by teacher trainers in most taught sessions
- the strong focus on inclusive practice in teaching and learning
- good personal support for trainees from tutors across all centres
- good links between initial teacher trainers and those responsible for the management of human resources in partner colleges
- systematic course review and action planning for improvement.

Areas for attention

The partnership should address:

- trainees' underdeveloped skills in evaluating the impact of their teaching on learning and matching learning activities to individual learners' needs
- insufficient access for trainees to a variety of practical teaching and assessment at different levels and to learners of different age groups
- underdeveloped use of trainees' individual learning plans and the full range of assessment information to inform target-setting for improvement
- insufficient attention to the assessment and development of trainees' skills in applying the minimum core of literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology (ICT), in the context of their teaching practice
- inadequate monitoring and review of the quality and impact of mentoring arrangements for trainees
- insufficient routine analysis of cross-partnership staff development needs and opportunities for the sharing of good practice.

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

Achievement of trainees

6. Trainees typically bring a wealth of prior experience to their training. The vast majority are professional in their approach and keen to improve their practice. Most make satisfactory or better progress in developing their teaching. However, a significant minority have few opportunities to develop their wider professional skills, such as working with tutorial groups, or to engage in extended planning for course delivery. Some have teaching that is restricted to a few hours with a single group of adults. Consequently their experiences do not reflect the diverse nature of learners across the FE sector.

7. Trainees pay due regard to equality and diversity issues. They work hard to establish a rapport with their students and promote positive values and attitudes in their lessons. Most have appropriately high expectations of what their students should achieve; although they are often less skilful in matching their teaching to the individual learning needs of students being taught within the same group.

8. Trainees appreciate, and are receptive to, advice as to how they might improve their teaching. They reflect on their progress in journals and reviews. However, their ability to undertake detailed reflection varies considerably. While journal entries are often self-critical and include pertinent comments, they tend to be insufficiently analytical, particularly in terms of linking the taught programme to their practical experience or evaluating the impact of their teaching on students' learning. In one example of good practice, the trainee reflected on how experiential learning theory might be used to inform the structure of a new course being developed.

9. The majority of trainees have good professional experience and are well qualified in the subjects they teach. They apply their extensive practical experience and knowledge of their specialist area to very good effect in much of their teaching. For some trainees, their access to practical teaching is narrow, with insufficient opportunity to teach across a range of different age groups and levels of study; for example, the teaching practice of one trainee was constrained to highly prescriptive activities which limited opportunities to engage in sustained independent planning or to develop a wider range of teaching styles.

10. Typically, trainees plan lessons conscientiously, making good use of resources. Lesson plans generally include a variety of appropriate learning activities. However, even when differentiation of activity to meet individual students' needs is considered explicitly, trainees are not always successful at realising this in practice. A few plans lack clear learning outcomes and sometimes learning outcomes are identified as a process, rather than the knowledge and skills students will take from the lesson. Trainees vary significantly in their ability to integrate the use of ICT or information and learning technology (ILT) into their teaching.

11. In most cases trainees use a range of teaching strategies and resources which enable their students to make good progress in the specialist

area. Many lessons are well-paced, with a variety of learning activities. In contrast, trainees lack confidence in developing the literacy and numeracy skills of their students in the context of their lessons.

12. Most trainees are able to establish positive working relationships with the students they teach. In the main, classes are well managed and productive. One trainee whose behaviour management skills were initially weak responded well to the training provided on the course and is now more confident at establishing and maintaining clear expectations of students' conduct.

13. Trainees' experience and knowledge of assessment is very variable. Assessment is often weakest where trainees have minimal teaching or are not appropriately integrated within the course team. In other cases, the nature of the trainees' teaching provides few opportunities for assessing and recording students' progress because this is not a required component of the work they do. Trainees' ability to use questioning as an assessment tool is uneven. Few trainees make full use of questioning to monitor students' progress or to probe and extend their understanding.

14. The vast majority of trainees are sensitive to the individual needs of the students they teach. They recognise barriers to learning and provide high levels of informal individual support, particularly where students have identified learning difficulties or disabilities. One trainee demonstrated a good understanding of the needs of a student diagnosed with dyslexia and paid careful attention to issues such as font style, colour and size of text in lessons. More generally, trainees are less proficient at systematically planning and managing differentiated teaching and learning activities.

Quality of training

15. The content of both the certificate and post-graduate certificate programme is designed to enable trainees to meet the Further Education National Training Organisation (FENTO) teaching standards. Units are appropriately cross-referenced with these standards and, for the benefit of those trainees with substantial teaching in higher education, with the learning and teaching activities prescribed by the Institute for Learning and Teaching. Coverage of the minimum core skills in language, numeracy and literacy is suitably embedded within the unit specifications. Provision for students with a wide range of learning difficulties and disabilities is thoroughly covered in a unit on inclusive practice. The courses are up-to-date and take account of recent changes both in the further and higher education sector and in more general education.

16. While coherence is not always evident from the course documentation, for example the handbook contained errors which confused trainees at the start of the course, the taught elements and assignments combine well to enable them to develop their teaching skills. Most trainees are able to link the theoretical aspects of the course with teaching in their specialist areas

and are able to explain how the course has helped them to be more effective teachers.

17. Teacher trainers are well-qualified and suitably experienced further education teachers. The best training sessions are very well planned and employ a good range of strategies to stimulate and engage trainees. In these sessions, the content is interesting and often challenging. During a session on provision for students with severe hearing problems, the teacher trainer used a large model of the structure of the ear to prompt discussion and questions. In another, on motivation, the teacher trainer made very good use of his own, well produced, recording of students' views on their course to prompt a discussion on intrinsic and extrinsic motivation.

18. Weaker sessions are characterised by flaws in classroom management, such as poor use of trainees' contribution in directing the flow of discussion, or ineffective handling of the transition from small group to whole class activity. A few training sessions provide insufficient challenge or miss opportunities to link theory to practice, especially for trainees working in a non-FE environment such as work-based training. Overall, insufficient focussed attention is given to developing trainees' skills in using ICT to enhance learning.

19. Mentoring arrangements are not consistently well-established across the partnership and the quality of mentoring is very variable. Some mentors are only able to make a limited contribution because of other pressures on their time. At its best, mentoring offers trainees the chance to benefit from observing and working alongside experienced and skilled practitioners in their specialist area. A few mentors hold positions of responsibility which enable them to align their teaching with that of trainees to create opportunities for team teaching and follow-up discussions following lesson observations.

20. Trainees who are not employed in the colleges, or who are on hourly-paid contracts, are often most disadvantaged by inequities in mentoring. A number of them had yet to identify a mentor at a very late stage in their course. The relationship between the specialist mentor's role and the assessed elements of the programme is insufficiently well-developed.

21. The quality of feedback from lesson observation is generally good. However, trainees receive little comment on the subject specialist elements of their teaching. Feedback from teacher trainers, and that from workplace mentors, is not linked together in a systematic way. The quality of feedback on written assignments is often detailed but usually restricted to the generic aspects of the course. In a few cases, trainees receive thoughtful encouragement, but insufficient guidance on how their work could be improved. Feedback on marked work rarely makes reference to the minimum core skills of language, literacy and numeracy.

22. Trainees' progress is reviewed in individual meetings with trainers who offer high levels of personal and professional support. However, these sessions are insufficiently focussed on a systematic cycle of review, action

planning and target setting for improvement. There is confusion as to the role and purpose of the different pieces of documentation, such as professional development journals and continuing professional development files. Review of trainees' progress in developing the literacy and numeracy aspects of their skills is not well-established.

23. Both teacher trainers and trainees approach the task of completing reflective records and individual learning plans in different ways, but rarely in line with the guidance provided in the university handbook. For example, the reflections of one trainee focussed on a narrow range of teaching practice rather than extending to the wider professional and educational issues prescribed in the guidance. Few trainees are able to identify clear action points for improvement arising from reflection or feedback on their performance.

Management and quality assurance of provision

24. The partnership is well-established but a period of uncertainty in the university staffing delayed the pace of change. A slow response to staffing difficulties resulted in the very late withdrawal of the 2005/06 university-based pre-service course. As a consequence, eighteen prospective trainees were directed to study at other institutions or had their places deferred until 2006/07. However, in January new course leaders were appointed. Since then, links with partner colleges have been strengthened.

25. Partner colleges are demonstrating an increasing awareness of the benefits of linking initial teacher training to wider human resource (HR) management in their institutions. In the best practice teacher education is closely aligned with the college's HR and staff development services. In one college, staff from HR are involved in observing trainees teach. As part of their induction programme, new teachers receive helpful training in the college's approach to judging the quality of teaching and learning which helps them to prepare for entry to the Cert Ed and PGCE course.

26. Processes to select trainees for courses are satisfactory and these have been strengthened for new entrants for 2006/07. At the university, all applicants are interviewed and this includes a test of their literacy and numeracy skills, but not for ICT. In the colleges, trainees' literacy and numeracy skills are assessed at the start of their course. Where individual learning needs are identified, support sessions are offered but the take up of support is generally low. In one college a communicator and note-takers enable a trainee with hearing difficulties to make good progress.

27. Resources to support the training are satisfactory overall but, at the time of inspection, teacher trainers in the colleges did not have access to the university's on-line resources. In contrast, they have good access to continuing professional development opportunities within their colleges and at the university. However, there is insufficient, routine analysis of cross-partnership staff development needs or systematic sharing of good practice. A new model for tutor induction and training is being established.

28. The moderation of trainees assessed work is thorough. This includes double marking in the colleges and further scrutiny by the university team and external examiner. Procedures have been strengthened recently through the requirement for college-based programmed leaders to produce a summary report and assessment action plan based on moderation outcomes.

29. The university and partner colleges meet their statutory requirements in relation to the implementation and monitoring of policies on equality and diversity. While, independently, they demonstrate a clear commitment to widening participation, the partnership is yet to define a clear strategy for recruiting trainees from under-represented groups.

30. Under the direction of the new leadership team, there is an increasingly strong sense of purpose in the university's management and quality assurance of the partnership. A systematic approach to course review is leading to improvements; for example in mentor training and the moderation of teaching observation. However, the capacity of partner colleges to support mentoring, and most significantly for those trainees employed in other institutions, represents a continuing challenge. Arrangements for monitoring the quality and impact of mentoring on trainees' achievement and standards, although under review, are inadequate.

31. Alongside a range of recently introduced quality initiatives, revised procedures for the transfer of information, on trainee progress, and data sharing across the partnership are being established. A new model of internal benchmarking of success rates and closer monitoring of provision aims to raise standards and set targets for improvement. Overall, significant progress in course development was noted between the two phases of the inspection.

Appendix list of colleges

The following colleges were members of the HEI Partnership at the time of the inspection;

- City College Manchester
- Halton College
- Macclesfield College
- Mid-Cheshire College
- Ridge Danyers College
- South Cheshire College
- South Trafford College
- Stoke on Trent College
- West Cheshire College