



Further Education Teacher Training

University of Central England

Faculty of Education
Attwood Building
Perry Barr
Birmingham
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Inspection report
2005/06

Managing Inspector:
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The inspection

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. It was conducted in two phases by Her Majesty's inspectors (HMI) and a full-time inspector from the Adult Learning Inspectorate. Pre-service and in-service provision was evaluated during the inspection. Inspectors focused on the quality of training and management and quality assurance procedures during the first phase, which took place in February 2006. During the second phase, inspectors concentrated upon evaluating the achievements of trainees through observing the teaching of in-service trainees and gathering evidence on the progress of all trainees during the course. Phase two of the inspection was completed in June 2006.

Background

3. The University of Central England provides initial teacher training (ITT) courses for further education (FE) teachers and other trainers from the post-compulsory sector, leading to the university's Post Graduate Certificate of Education (PGCE) and Certificate of Higher Education: Further Education (Cert HE) qualifications. Both are endorsed qualifications and satisfy the Secretary of State's requirements for FE teachers. Three training routes are available, a pre-service, full-time PGCE course on which there are 50 trainees and two in-service routes - a part-time PGCE course on which there are 30 trainees and a part-time Cert HE course on which there are 129 and two exam only trainees.
4. On all routes, trainees must gain 120 hours of teaching practice while in their work placement. The full-time PGCE course begins in January and lasts for one academic year. Trainees attend classes at the university for two days a week and spend the other three days in their work placement. The part-time PGCE course lasts for two academic years beginning in January. Trainees attend classes at the university on one day a week. The Cert HE course lasts for two academic years. It has two start dates – September and January – and trainees attend classes for half a day each week. Trainees with appropriate National awarding body qualifications are able to transfer directly on to the second year of the Cert HE course.
5. All PGCE and most Cert HE modules are taught and assessed by university staff from the School of Secondary and Post-Compulsory Education and most teaching takes place at the university's Perry Barr site. However, a group of approximately 20 in-service specialist language trainees are taught separately at the Brasshouse Language Centre, where most of them are employed. In addition, South Birmingham College works in partnership with

the university in providing training for approximately 50 of its own staff. Modules are taught and assessed by college staff, subject to the university's quality assurance procedures.

Effectiveness of provision

6. The quality of provision is satisfactory (grade 3). The overall achievement of trainees is satisfactory but that of in-service trainees is good. Trainees demonstrate understanding of a good range of teaching and learning strategies in planning their lessons. This is generally supported by good theoretical knowledge. The structure and organisation of courses that begin in January is less secure than those beginning in September. There is good bespoke provision at a specialist language centre, but in general trainees' work placement experience and access to specialist support is too variable. Not all trainees gain experience in teaching a sufficiently wide range of ability levels or class sizes. On the pre-service PGCE, not all trainees gain appropriate teaching experience sufficiently early in their course. The quality of training sessions in the university is variable. While some trainers model good practice effectively, others do not engage trainees or differentiate sufficiently to meet the needs of individuals. Pastoral support offered by teacher trainers is good. The quality of mentoring for trainees is uneven because it is largely dependent on goodwill. Access to opportunities for trainees to develop subject specialist teaching skills is inconsistent. Recruitment and selection processes are good but there are inequalities in the experience of trainees in placements and with their subject and professional support.

Key strengths

Inspectors identified the following strengths:

- good professional values and practice and clear commitment to raising students' achievement demonstrated by in-service trainees
- good theoretical knowledge and understanding that supports and enhances the good range of teaching and learning strategies used by trainees
- good pastoral care for trainees
- good bespoke provision at the specialist language centre
- thorough and well-documented selection procedures

Areas for attention

The partnership should address:

- inconsistencies in the timing and quality of work placements and the range of teaching experience gained by trainees
- the variable quality of training sessions in the university
- insufficient differentiation of training to meet the needs of all trainees
- uneven access to high quality subject specific support
- deficiencies in the structure and organisation of courses that begin in January

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

Achievement of trainees

7. Overall, trainees reach a satisfactory level of teaching competence and make appropriate progress in relation to their prior attainment and experience. Many in-service trainees have extensive management and administrative responsibilities and others, whether in full or part time positions, make positive contributions to their departments and workplaces. They demonstrate good professional values and practice, have high expectations of their students and a clear commitment to raising their students' achievement. For some trainees, their very good subject knowledge, high expectations and thoughtful teaching and learning strategies, make them very good role models for their students.

8. All trainees are required to engage in self evaluation and some adopt a genuinely reflective approach to teaching and learning, which results in an improvement in their practice. However, self evaluation is sometimes overly descriptive and mechanistic. Most trainees are clear about their own development needs. Targets set by tutors are acted upon and lead to improvement. Some trainees are gaining a good range of teaching experience in terms of age groups, ability levels and class sizes. However, for too many, experiences are limited. For example, a number of specialist language trainees only teach groups of highly motivated adult learners and have no opportunity to teach in the wider FE context.

9. Although most trainees have good subject knowledge, some are unclear about the need to develop subject pedagogy. Trainees plan their lessons well and the majority set clear teaching and learning objectives, which they effectively convey to their students. However, a small number of trainees struggle to identify learning outcomes and confuse learning outcomes with learning activities.

10. Trainees use a range of teaching and learning strategies to engage their students' interest, meet their needs and promote their learning. They can relate their own practice to different aspects of humanist, behaviourist and cognitive psychology that they have covered on the course. Trainees' questioning technique is good and they use it effectively to monitor students' progress in lessons. They use praise appropriately to encourage and motivate students. Most trainees are aware of the minimum core requirements for literacy, language and numeracy but few have sufficient opportunity to develop practical skills in supporting their students' literacy and numeracy needs. Trainees acknowledge that the course has helped them to understand the importance of differentiation in lessons and some are able to demonstrate this effectively in their teaching, through differentiated questioning, resources, tasks and support.

11. Trainees use a wide range of resources effectively. The information and learning technology (ILT) skills of trainees, including their use of interactive white boards, have improved and are beginning to have a positive impact on their teaching. Trainees organise and manage their classes well and give careful attention to room layout and resources to create a suitable learning environment.

12. Most trainees have opportunities to mark students' work and all have at least a satisfactory understanding of assessment. Marking and assessment is generally accurate. In the best examples, trainees provide detailed and encouraging feedback identifying how students might improve and this is linked to clear assessment criteria.

13. Trainees are sensitive to the differing needs of their students. They use their knowledge of students' individual needs to plan lessons that support and challenge them effectively and carefully monitor students' progress within lessons. As a result of the course, trainees are aware of the needs of students with learning difficulties and disabilities and, for example, are able to ensure that students with literacy and numeracy needs, dyslexia and hearing impairments are supported appropriately.

Quality of training

14. The structure and content of the programme meets national qualification requirements. Good progress has been made in embedding the minimum core requirements in literacy, language and numeracy across the programme modules. Courses starting in January follow the same model as

those beginning in September. However, trainees with a January start have greater difficulty in securing placements. For these trainees, late feedback on the first formal teaching observation and lack of placement opportunities over the summer months results in trainees experiencing difficulties in linking theory to practice in assignments.

15. The extent to which training secures and develops trainees' knowledge and skills is too variable. Some trainees have a wide range of teaching opportunities while others teach only a limited range of courses in terms of age groups, ability levels and group sizes. On the pre-service PGCE course, where trainees currently take responsibility for arranging their own work placement, the quality of their experience varies significantly. In the best experiences, trainees are able to participate fully in the institutions they are placed in and have opportunities to demonstrate good professional values and practice. A few trainees, having begun the course in January, were still waiting for a placement at a relatively late stage in their course.

16. The development of subject-specific knowledge and skills is patchy. Recently, an initial audit of trainees' subject knowledge has been put in place. Some trainees receive good subject specific support from their mentors and teacher trainers, for example, there is good specialist support for language trainees at the Brasshouse Language Centre. However, not all trainees have mentors or teacher trainers who are subject specialists. There is no requirement, under current programme regulations, for mentors to help trainees develop their subject-specific knowledge and as a result much depends on the goodwill of mentors. The university is aware of this weakness and plans to extend the responsibility of mentors to include subject specific support in the future.

17. Overall the training programme is well organised and the quality of documentation is good. Teacher trainers and mentors provide good pastoral support and are sympathetic to circumstances of individual trainees that might impact on their learning. Trainees provide good peer support for each other and this contributes to their overall skills development.

18. The quality of training sessions in the university varies. The best sessions model good practice, are well planned, lively and engaging, use a variety of teaching methods and encourage trainees to relate theory to practice. Weaker sessions rely too heavily on tutor-led methods of delivery that do not engage trainees or differentiate sufficiently to meet the needs of individuals. This is reflected in the lesson plans used by teacher trainers, which do not model good practice for trainees and which do not make explicit the impact of teaching on learning. Trainers have access to a wide range of learning materials and resources, including information and communication technology (ICT) but this is not always used to best effect.

19. There is some lack of clarity about course procedures and confusion over the responsibilities of mentors and teacher trainers regarding

placements, target-setting and the monitoring of trainees' progress. For example, some teacher trainers are unclear about the number of lesson observations to be carried out by mentors and the status and timing of joint teacher trainer/mentor lesson observations.

20. Programmes are insufficiently tailored to meet the individual needs of all trainees. Trainees come to the programmes with a wide range of qualifications and experiences and a thorough initial assessment of trainees' literacy, numeracy and ICT skills provides tutors with a useful range of information to understand individual starting points. While some training and support is offered as a result of these initial assessments, the information is not used systematically to identify and respond to specific individual training needs. For example, some very experienced part-time trainees have to cover elements of the programme with which they are already very familiar. There is insufficient attempt to differentiate training in order to meet the differing needs of individuals.

21. Although teacher trainers provide good pastoral support, this has not been adequately focused on challenging trainees to further their professional development. Monitoring of trainees' progress has not been sufficiently rigorous. For example, it has not incorporated feedback on written assignments, lesson observations and trainees' self-evaluations. Target setting with trainees to bring about improvements has been weak and progress is not effectively measured against trainees' individual learning needs. Greater clarity has recently been provided about who is responsible for target setting and greater attention is now being given to setting specific, measurable targets, which are beginning to be monitored more closely.

22. Trainees are given clear and detailed guidance on assessment requirements. Assignments are generally well-designed and require trainees to relate theory to practice. However, as a result of structural weaknesses in the provision, a few trainees have completed assignments with very little, or no, teaching experience. Overall, the assessment of written work is satisfactory and feedback comments are constructive.

Management and quality assurance of provision

23. The recruitment, selection and interview process is thorough and well organised. Documentation and reporting procedures are good. Trainees come from a wide variety of diverse backgrounds and experience. The courses attract a significant number of trainees from minority ethnic groups. Good account is taken of trainees' prior learning and experience in determining their entry point on the course. Opportunities for developmental activities to prepare for training are variable and depend on the individual concerned.

24. The modular structure of the programme is well planned. Satisfactory formal management structures are in place. There is however, a lack of coherence and consistency across the different elements of the programme.

The quality of training provided in placements is inconsistent. The current lack of formal partnership arrangements between the university and its work placement institutions means that the university has little control over this. The requirement for 120 hours of teaching experience is generally met but, in the case of some pre-service PGCE trainees, such experience may not begin until quite late in the term, especially if trainees are having difficulty finding a placement.

25. Although the documentation includes clearly defined roles and responsibilities for the course director, teacher trainers and mentors, in practice there is some confusion. Teacher trainers are not all clear about the required frequency of and responsibility for teaching observation and mentors' perception of their role sometimes differs from that of teacher trainees. However, the university is aware of these shortcomings and has introduced a number of significant changes. These are leading to greater clarity of roles and responsibility, in particular those of mentors, whose present role of assessing trainees teaching is being extended to include regular subject and professional support.

26. Resources for teaching are good. Teacher trainers are appropriately qualified, highly motivated and committed to the programmes. Training rooms are well designed and well equipped with ICT such as interactive whiteboards, and laptops. Training materials are of good quality and course information is available on the university website. Trainees have access to university support services and the learning resources centre.

27. Formal partnership agreements requiring work placements and the provision of regular mentor support have only recently been introduced in a small number of placements. These arrangements are planned to be extended for all placements from September 2006. In the absence of such agreements, voluntary arrangements have been made directly between trainees and subject mentors. Most of the support offered has been dependent on mentors' goodwill and is inconsistent in its quality and coverage. Despite this, mentor training is tailored to mentors' needs and all mentors attend training sessions before they are allowed to formally assess trainees' teaching.

28. Assessment decisions in relation to trainees at the pass/fail boundary are secure. Procedures for internally moderating written assignments are good. Moderation is effective in identifying inconsistencies and ensuring prompt remedial action is taken. However, until recent changes to procedures, the monitoring and moderation of mentor support and assessment of trainees' teaching has been weak. Although the total of 120 hours of teaching experience is monitored, the quality of trainees' teaching experience, in terms of range of teaching and the extent to which trainees are gaining the breadth and depth of experience needed, is not.

29. Overall, quality assurance procedures are satisfactory. The annual process of evaluation takes account of external examiners' comments and student feedback but not the views of mentors or work placement institutions. Student questionnaires are completed at the end of each module and the results of these are used effectively to review modules. The committee structure aims to ensure appropriate student representation. While pre-service trainees feel able to comment to their tutors on issues that concern them, they are not sufficiently aware of the student representation system and feel therefore they have no formal channel to provide feedback.