



Further Education Teacher Training

University of Nottingham

School of Education  
Jubilee Campus  
Nottingham  
NG7 2RD

Inspection report  
2005/06

Managing Inspector:  
Vincent Ashworth HMI

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## The inspection

1. The inspection was carried out in accordance with the Framework for the inspection of initial training of further education (FE) teachers and the guidance in the Handbook for the inspection of initial training of further education teachers, both published in 2004.
2. It was conducted in two phases by Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI), supported by a full-time inspector from the Adult Learning Inspectorate and a specialist additional inspector. Both the pre-service and in-service courses 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 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 2 of the inspection was completed in June 2006.

## Background

3. Nottingham University's School of Education offers a one-year full-time pre-service course and a two-year part-time course for trainees who are already employed in the skills sector. Both courses lead to the postgraduate certificate in continuing education (PGCCE). The qualification is endorsed by Standards Verification UK (SVUK) and satisfies the Secretary of State's requirements for FE teachers. The university works collaboratively with local FE providers and has developed its provision to reflect the local skills demand for FE teachers. In particular, the university gives priority to applicants who wish to teach Skills for Life subjects.
4. 40 places are available each year on the full-time programme and 20 places on the part-time (year 1) programme. Trainees on the in-service course attend the university one afternoon each week over two years. Pre-service trainees attend full time at the university until the second half of the first term, at which point they start to attend their placement for one day a week. They attend their placement on a full time basis for the duration of the spring term, and return to the university in the summer term. The main teaching input on both courses is provided by university staff. The assessment of trainees' teaching is shared between the university and subject specialist mentors in the workplace.

## Effectiveness of provision

5. The overall quality of provision is adequate (grade 3). The majority of trainees gain in confidence and competence over the course. Trainees are highly committed to ensuring that their students, many of whom are reluctant learners or who have previously experienced barriers to learning, are able to make progress. Both the in-service and pre-service courses are well-planned and provide high levels of academic challenge and debate. Arrangements for recruiting and interviewing trainees ensure that they are well-prepared when they start the course. The university's partnership arrangements with local colleges are good. Assessment is accurate, although feedback to students on

their written work is not always timely. The university is highly dependent on the contribution of subject mentors in the workplace to ensure coherence between the generic and subject-specific aspects of the training. The quality and formality of the subject mentoring trainees receive is very variable. As a result many pre-service trainees and hourly-paid in-service trainees are not provided with sufficient breadth of experience across all aspects of the role of an FE teacher. Teacher trainers do not systematically provide exemplars of good practice in FE teaching and the university pays insufficient attention to monitoring and improving the quality of teaching and learning on taught elements of the programmes. Quality assurance is robust and results in improvement. The university has strong capacity to improve and has responded positively to interim feedback.

## Key strengths

Inspectors identified the following strengths:

- high calibre of trainees who are skilled in motivating their students
- well-planned programme with a strong focus on the minimum core of language, literacy and numeracy
- good personal support for trainees provided by teacher trainers and mentors
- good collaboration between the university and regional colleges
- rigorous and effective quality assurance of many aspects of provision

## Areas for attention

The partnership should address:

- variable degree of formality and rigour with which trainees reflect on and evaluate their own teaching practice and development
- insufficient opportunities for pre-service trainees and some in-service trainees to develop their skills more widely across the roles and responsibilities required of an FE teacher
- lack of exemplars of techniques to model good practice in teaching and learning during university training sessions
- insufficient focus on setting and reviewing developmental targets for trainees
- variation in the quality of subject specific mentoring provided to trainees in the workplace.

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

## Achievement of trainees

6. Most trainees make satisfactory progress by the end of the course. They develop a sound theoretical basis on which to build their skills in teaching and learning. With very few exceptions, they develop in confidence over the duration of the course. Trainees demonstrate a strong commitment to the professional values associated with working in the post-compulsory sector. In particular, those working with students with low levels of literacy and/or numeracy are dedicated to ensuring that they develop and progress to further study, training or employment.

7. Trainees are well qualified and most have good subject knowledge. A number of in-service trainees teaching on Skills for Life courses have already acquired specialist qualifications in teaching literacy and/or numeracy. All trainees are able to draw effectively on their prior experience and expertise to make their lessons interesting and relevant. However, some pre-service trainees do not have sufficient subject knowledge. This is particularly the case for those trainees who are training to teach subjects that are new to them. For example, a humanities graduate did not have adequate specialist knowledge to teach adult literacy effectively.

8. Over the course, trainees develop good relationships with their tutors and mentors and act readily on advice given for improvement. They are confident in evaluating their teaching and can identify aspects that are effective and those that require some further development. For example, a trainee who teaches English as a second language was able to identify the need to improve her handouts by making them more relevant to a culturally diverse group of students. The degree of formality and rigour with which trainees record their reflective practice is too variable. Trainees' evaluations of their teaching are not always informed by evidence of the progress made by their students or the effectiveness of the learning that has taken place in their lessons. Trainees give insufficient consideration to ways in which they are developing their subject specific pedagogy alongside the more generic aspects of their teaching.

9. Trainees are enthusiastic and prepare well for their lessons. Most are able to articulate clear learning objectives, but they often fail to plan how progress towards achieving them will be monitored or how achievement will be assessed during the lesson. Some pre-service trainees lack creativity and imagination in their lesson planning and rely too frequently on a formulaic approach to teaching and learning. Where the quality of placement mentoring is good, trainees have been inspired to broaden their repertoire of teaching techniques.

10. In their teaching, most trainees use an appropriate mix of activities and resources which are generally successful in securing students' participation and improving their knowledge and understanding. However some activities, particularly small group work, are unsuccessful because trainees are not sufficiently clear about the learning aims or what they want students to gain from the planned activity. Occasionally trainees are too quick to provide answers to the questions they pose for their students and

are not sufficiently skilled in using techniques to encourage students to arrive at their own conclusions. Most trainees are able to deal effectively with instances of challenging behaviour, but in some cases trainees fail to address students' lack of punctuality.

11. The extent to which trainees demonstrate competence in assessing and monitoring their students' progress is variable. Most have a clear understanding of different methods of assessment and their purpose. Students' work is generally marked carefully, with helpful suggestions for improvement. In many cases, trainees take care to make students aware of any weaknesses in grammar or spelling. However, too few trainees are able to demonstrate good practice in the use of students' individual learning plans. Pre-service trainees in particular do not have a sufficient grasp of their students' prior attainment to be able to monitor their progress effectively. Wherever possible, trainees ensure that students are very well supported, both in class and in tutorial sessions; most have a good knowledge of the central support services available within their organisations.

## Quality of training

12. The course has been carefully planned to allow trainees to meet the national requirements for FE teachers. The minimum core curriculum of language, literacy and numeracy is embedded fully within the qualification. One of the central elements of the course is a module entitled "Basic Skills for the Post Compulsory Sector". This provides an experiential approach that both develops trainees' personal skills and raises their awareness of strategies to support their students' development in functional skills. Trainees maintain a portfolio which records their progress in achieving the minimum core standards. The university undertakes thorough diagnostic testing of trainees' numeracy skills and appropriate support is provided where weaknesses are identified.

13. The content of the course provides up-to-date input on contemporary developments in the post compulsory sector. Course handbooks are detailed and clearly indicate what trainees will study, how they will be assessed, their rights and responsibilities and where they can get support, if and when they need it. University staff draw on both their own current research as well as that of others to stimulate academic debate throughout the course. This also serves to encourage scholarly activity amongst trainees themselves.

14. For some trainees on the pre-service course and in-service trainees who are employed on an hourly basis, their range of experience on placement or in the workplace is too narrow. For example some trainees do not have the opportunity to mark their students' work, attend course team meetings or get involved in pastoral care and support. In some instances trainees are not given access to their students' individual learning plans or their records of initial diagnostic assessment. The university does not monitor the extent to which either pre-service or in-service trainees are able to gain experience across the full range for which they are being trained.

15. Training sessions are generally well planned and exercises are carefully designed. Tasks set generate lively debate and trainees work at a high academic level. Effective training includes imaginative exercises, such as a quiz on the skills for life strategy and analysis of the strategy itself, to develop trainees' knowledge and understanding of wider educational concepts and initiatives. Teacher trainers make very good use of in-service trainees' own teaching as a learning resource during their sessions. For example, in one observed session the teacher trainer drew effectively on in-service trainees' own experiences of initial assessment and diagnosis of their students' literacy and numeracy needs. The discussion of different methodologies enabled trainees to gain a deeper understanding of how other techniques could be applied to their own practice.

16. Weaker sessions are too formulaic and teacher trainers stick too closely to a narrow range of training methods. As a result trainees are not exposed to a wider and more dynamic range of training that captures their imagination and inspires them to try out the techniques in their own teaching. Although trainees are taught about differentiation and techniques relating to different learning styles, they rarely see practical examples of these within their training sessions. In response to feedback at the end of phase 1 of the inspection, the university has started to look at ways of systematically modelling good practice in FE teaching. For example, all members of the course team have recently received training in the use of information and learning technology (ILT) and have mapped its use across schemes of work and session plans.

17. Trainees are placed into tutor groups according to their subject specialism. There is no formal training to develop trainees' knowledge and skills in teaching their specialist area. The university relies entirely on subject specialist mentors to provide this input in the workplace. Trainees' experiences are highly variable, depending on the extent to which their mentor has the time and appropriate skills to direct the trainee's development. Training for mentors has taken place throughout the year, but not all mentors have been able to attend. As a consequence some mentors are insufficiently clear about their responsibilities, in particular their role in judging whether or not a trainee should pass the teaching practice component of the course.

18. College placements are generally matched well to the needs and aspirations of pre-service trainees. In almost all cases, mentors provide helpful advice, guidance and personal support to trainees. The individual tutorial programme has been strengthened from one of entitlement to one of requirement. The programme comprises a minimum number of scheduled one-to-one tutorials, designed to enable trainees to make more coherent links between the generic aspects of their course and their workplace practice. Tutorials, although helpful to trainees' assignment preparation, are not currently used as well as they could be for review, development and target setting in relation to trainees' general progress. Mentors do not systematically access or update individual learning plans for trainees on the in-service course. The university recognises this as an area for improvement

and has committed additional resources to improve tutorial practice and developmental target setting.

19. The assessment schedule is well-planned and assessment regulations are adhered to assiduously. External and internal moderation of both trainees' written work and teaching practice are very thorough. The quality and timeliness of feedback to trainees on their written work is uneven. Trainees are often given little or no indication of the steps they should take to improve their work and marking criteria are sometimes unclear. Tutors' comments on assignments often focus on the academic content of assignments without considering the extent to which trainees have used the assignment to develop their teaching practice. During the course of the inspection the university undertook a thorough review of assessment practice and revised procedures are in place for marking and feedback.

## Management and quality assurance of provision

20. The university's procedures for recruiting and selecting trainees are good. All applicants are interviewed by panels which comprise university staff and representatives from partner colleges. Interviews are thorough and decisions are recorded carefully against set criteria. Recruitment trends are carefully monitored by course managers and are matched to local skills needs in post compulsory education and training. Arrangements are in place to ensure that enhanced Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) checks are undertaken at an early stage for all successful pre-service trainees. Applicants who receive an offer of a place on the pre-service course are required to undertake observations within a post compulsory education setting prior to starting the course.

21. The university is highly committed to partnership working. The course team has worked hard to build strong links and establish a dialogue with local and regional providers. For example, in October 2005 the university organised a conference which allowed trainees and local providers to meet and debate the impact and importance of national issues on the local FE agenda. Links with local colleges are good. All institutions offering placements and work based teaching practice enter into a partnership agreement with the university. The Partnership Advisory Group is central to the university's strategy to engage with FE employers. This forum provides an opportunity for mentor coordinators from partner colleges and university staff to review operational and quality aspects of the course.

22. Trainees benefit from a broad range of learning resources. Teacher trainers are well qualified and mentors have a strong track-record in high quality teaching and learning in their subject specialisms. All trainees have been allocated a subject mentor. The School of Education's dedicated building offers state of the art facilities and technologies to support training and learning. Although trainees initially had some difficulties in accessing key texts in the library, these have been resolved since phase 1 of the inspection.

23. Management of the programmes is generally satisfactory and improving. Rationalisation and restructuring within the School of Education



has brought together all teacher training provision within one department. As a result the post-compulsory education course team has started to draw on good practice developed on university programmes that lead to Qualified Teacher Status. The School of Education has its own equality and diversity policy and a committee to oversee its implementation.

24. Recommendations made by external examiners have been systematically evaluated by the course team and have resulted in action for improvement. There is rigorous internal and external moderation of the quality of trainees' teaching. On both courses, good use is made of evaluations by trainees, tutors and mentors. Feedback questionnaires completed by trainees for each module of the course contain both specific questions which allow for quantitative analysis as well as more open-ended questions which allow trainees to express their comments more fully. Trainees' views are carefully analysed and considered. A staff-student consultative committee meets each term. This forum allows the university to act swiftly on any immediate concerns or issues trainees raise about their course.

25. Procedures for self-evaluation are well-established and result in a targeted development plan with clear success criteria. Progress towards achieving the aims and priorities of the plan are monitored and reviewed on a regular basis by university managers and the course team. However, there is insufficient attention to the monitoring and improvement of the quality of taught elements of the course. Actions in the development plan focus on systems and processes that will improve the quality of trainees' experience, but do not identify how the university will ensure that its teacher trainers have the skills and experience to exemplify the very best practice in FE teaching.