



Further Education Teacher Training

University of Portsmouth

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Inspection report
2005/06

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The inspection

1. This inspection was conducted 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.
2. It was carried out in two phases by an inspection team which comprised three additional inspectors, a full-time inspector from the Adult Learning Inspectorate and a member of Her Majesty's Inspectorate. A fourth additional inspector joined the team for phase two. Pre-service provision at the university and in-service provision at two colleges were evaluated as part of the inspection. During the first phase in November 2005, inspectors focussed on the quality of training and management and quality assurance procedures. During the second phase, inspectors concentrated on 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. The University of Portsmouth works in partnership with four colleges of further education (FE) to provide initial teacher training courses for FE teachers and other trainers from the post-compulsory sector, which lead to the university's postgraduate certificate of education (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 39 trainees were enrolled, and a part-time in-service course on which 143 trainees were enrolled.
4. The pre-service course lasts for one academic year. After a three week university-based induction, pre-service trainees spend three days a week in a college placement throughout most of the remainder of the training. These placements take place in one of 11 colleges, which include the four partner institutions, although there are opportunities for trainees to spend short periods in other institutions during placement days. The in-service course is designed as a two year programme. However, all trainees enter directly into the second year, facilitated by arrangements for the formal accreditation of prior learning.
5. The taught elements of the pre-service course are provided by teacher trainers in the university and the taught elements of the in-service course by teacher trainers in partner colleges. Assessment of the pre-service course is shared between university teacher trainers and placement mentors; and all assessment of teaching is undertaken by subject specialists. Partner colleges are largely responsible for the assessment of in-service trainees. Subject specialists contribute to the assessment of their teaching to varying degrees. University staff make assessment visits to trainees on placement and in each partner college.

Effectiveness of provision

6. The overall quality of provision is good (grade 2). The partnership has introduced substantial recent improvements, including some which are not yet firmly established.

7. Trainees are confident and competent teachers who have a good understanding of the learning process. They plan effectively, demonstrate high levels of subject or vocational expertise and provide learning activities which seek to take account of the needs of their students. All the lessons observed were of at least satisfactory quality and the majority were of good and, in one case, very good quality. However, a number of pre-service trainees lack sufficient breadth of experience in their placements and are not always confident in undertaking formal assessments, using assessment data to inform practice and maintaining effective records.

8. Trainees benefit from effective taught sessions, strong central tutoring and the increasing attention given to subject and vocational pedagogy and the minimum core of language, literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology (ICT), even though the strengthening of these aspects of provision is at an early stage. However, the management of mentoring across the partnership is underdeveloped and inconsistencies in trainees' experiences and the effectiveness of mentor provision remain.

Key strengths

Inspectors identified the following strengths:

- the high calibre of trainees recruited onto the courses
- very proficient planning and teaching demonstrated by trainees towards the end of their training, including their unusually skilful handling of group work
- good quality of centre-based training sessions
- strong support provided for trainees by teacher trainers and mentors
- rigorous procedures for assessing trainees' teaching and course assignments and for moderating all assessment judgements
- recently introduced and thorough selection arrangements now in place across the partnership
- very effective communication across the partnership

- very wide range of pertinent evidence employed to review provision
- particularly constructive action plan created in response to the findings of the first stage of the inspection

Areas for attention

The partnership should address:

- trainees' limited knowledge of a broad range of relevant course specifications and, in the case of a number of pre-service trainees, their lack of confidence in undertaking formal assessments, using assessment data to inform practice, and maintaining effective records
- the absence of structured links to ensure that different elements of the training build on and re-enforce each other
- the need for further progress in embedding the minimum core into provision
- ways of extending the attention now being given centrally to subject pedagogy, particularly for pre-service trainees
- the underdeveloped management of mentoring which leads to inconsistency in the experiences and training provided in the work place to develop trainees' subject pedagogy and wider professional expertise

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

Achievement of trainees

9. Trainees are confident and competent practitioners, committed to enabling students to make progress and reach high standards. Most become increasingly adept at examining critically their own practice, complete detailed evaluations of assessed lessons and adopt a highly responsible approach to professional development, making the most of every opportunity to extend their proficiency during their placements.

10. In the work place, they are well integrated into curriculum areas and participate effectively in activities such as department meetings and departmental training and development. However, few of the pre-service trainees observed, had gained sufficient understanding of the wider college context, including the role of the tutor.

11. Most assignments are of high quality and demonstrate thorough scrutiny of practice in the light of relevant theory. The majority of trainees extend their

expertise through general, rather than subject- or vocational-specific, reading and research.

12. All trainees possess the subject knowledge necessary to teach effectively in their placement, and, in the case of in-service trainees, relevant professional experience which they employ productively in the classroom. They have a good understanding of statutory requirements related to equality of opportunity and the promotion of good race relations. Most have developed suitable literacy, numeracy and ICT skills by the end of the course.

13. Usually, trainees plan schemes of work and lessons effectively, giving careful attention to health and safety. The most competent planning is thorough, detailed and well presented, and gives close attention to the preparation of accommodation and materials. Where schemes and plans are already in place, trainees adapt them appropriately to match the needs of particular classes.

14. In their teaching, trainees employ an appropriate range of teaching methods, learning activities, resources and groupings. They are unusually skilful in devising and managing group work which stimulates students' interest and promotes effective learning. Very occasionally, otherwise good teaching is marred by ineffectual starts, rushed closures or poorly presented materials. Some trainees are constrained in their use of ICT by limited access to the necessary technology.

15. Relationships between trainees and students are good, even in the case of potentially disaffected groups. Most trainees communicate clearly with their students, providing succinct explanations, including relevant examples and using questions skilfully. Generally, trainees command respect, employ praise pertinently and introduce humour to good effect. They establish clear expectations of behaviour and are willing to enforce these expectations where necessary. Consequently, students participate well. Even where students drift off task, trainees are able to regain their attention swiftly and calmly.

16. While most trainees have a sound knowledge of the assessment specifications of the courses they are teaching and are skilful in helping students prepare for external examinations, a number possess only a limited working knowledge of the broader range of relevant specifications. Pre-service trainees often lack confidence in coming to valid formal assessment judgements, and make little use of assessment information to inform teaching and learning. The quality of records is variable. Appropriate use is made of external accreditation by trainees teaching the minimum core.

17. Most trainees are competent in monitoring progress during lessons, and they integrate an increasingly wide range of informal assessment techniques into their teaching. Generally, written and oral feedback is clear and constructive. Students receive explicit guidance on how to make progress or achieve higher standards.

18. All trainees are knowledgeable about their students, and seek to ensure that they receive suitable support both during and outside lessons. The majority are familiar with college-based support mechanisms and well informed about Every Child Matters expectations.

Quality of training

19. The course covers the Standards Verification UK (SVUK), formerly FENTO, requirements well and is appropriately endorsed.

20. Currently, the PGCE and Cert Ed routes are distinguished by differentiated aims and learning outcomes. These courses are now subject to revisions which should ensure more effective differentiation and opportunities for progression from foundation degree to postgraduate training and beyond.

21. The training is giving increasing attention to subject training, on the pre-service route through weekly subject-focused sessions (action learning sets) and by strengthening the auditing of subject knowledge, and on both routes through greater emphasis on subject mentoring. Since the first stage of the inspection, the partnership has worked collaboratively with mentors to develop more formal procedures for probing and enhancing subject or vocational expertise, though with a rather narrow focus on what is to be taught in the placement rather than addressing the broader scope of the specialism. Subject mentoring is particularly effective where weekly meetings between mentor and trainee are timetabled and where the mentor has a good knowledge of how to facilitate effective professional development in the specialist subject. These developments are at an early stage across the partnership, and practice is inconsistent. Mentors do not always receive an allocation of time and documentation includes little on their subject responsibilities or the professional subject topics they should cover. Mentor training is not always taken up, though attendance is now logged and absence followed up by on-site training. As yet, neither trainees nor subject mentors grasp fully the training role of the mentor.

22. The course now addresses the minimum core, but this emphasis is also at an early stage. Provision is integrated into session plans and assignments and the pre-service route includes a substantial strand which addresses the minimum core. The training now gives attention to using ICT as a subject teaching tool, although access to ICT facilities in central training and for use when teaching varies between partner colleges and placements. Recently, arrangements for identifying the minimum core needs of individual trainees have been revised to strengthen initial assessment arrangements. Individual learning plans and reviews of progress became more effective over the year. However, pre-service trainees rarely teach aspects of the minimum core weekly as intended, and there have been few adjustments to programmes to take account of individual progress. Opportunities for the assessment of trainees' achievements in the minimum core are inconsistent across the partnership.

23. The course includes few formal links to guarantee coherence in the professional development of trainees. Consequently, the strong theoretical underpinning provided by the taught course is not consolidated systematically in the work place. Nevertheless, the concurrent taught and practice elements of provision encourage trainees to make links between both elements; and this potential is exploited through the practical focus of assignments and the use of teaching experience in centre-based sessions.

24. Within the work placement, trainees are intended to gain a breadth of experience. In the case of pre-service trainees, this works particularly well where the professional mentor ensures that arrangements are implemented as intended. However, the range of courses taught by trainees varies considerably, and is sometimes too limited. Trainees recognise these limitations and frequently seek to extend their expertise through observations, negotiating additional teaching during and after the end of the course, or visiting other institutions.

25. The placement experience of pre-service trainees is designed to develop their teaching expertise gradually. They benefit from a suitably staged introduction to teaching, which includes preliminary observations before they take on a gradually extended teaching load. They also profit from peer observation and some have the opportunity to teach collaboratively with an experienced teacher. Trainees' skills in planning are supported by a number of effective training devices, such as the requirement to produce a rationale for formally assessed lessons which requires them to take account of student needs and progression.

26. Centre-based training includes a suitable balance of approaches, including microteaching which gives pre-service trainees a helpful sheltered introduction to teaching. The introduction of an annual conference, involving both in-service and pre-service trainees, is designed to enhance provision further.

27. Most of the training sessions observed were of good or very good quality, and none was of less than satisfactory quality. They were characterised by thorough planning, clear objectives, appropriate content, a variety of techniques, up-to-date resources and close attention to the needs and backgrounds of trainees. The training moved effectively from theory to practice. Trainees were highly motivated, contributed well from their own experience, and engaged effectively with materials and tasks.

28. Trainees value highly the substantial individual support they receive from teacher trainers and, in most cases, mentors. Systematic and effective tutorial arrangements are in place centrally. In the work place, trainee progress is reviewed in regular meetings with mentors, most usefully where the mentor not only identifies precise targets but also provides clear guidance on how to address the targets and keeps track of improved practice. This process is now supported by early formative observation by subject mentors and structured observation guidance related to selected SVUK standards. Occasionally, targets and related

actions are framed as tasks to be completed rather than as professional development activities. Trainees are also encouraged to identify their own progress in the light of the SVUK standards, for instance by logging the standards demonstrate in individual lessons.

29. Summative assessment procedures are documented clearly. Suitable arrangements are in place for dealing with any trainee giving rise to concern. These have worked effectively in the few necessary instances.

30. The assessment of teaching is undertaken increasingly by subject specialists. In the pre-service course all assessment of teaching is by subject specialists. Formal written lesson observations are thorough and constructive, but are not always focused sufficiently on subject pedagogy. Nevertheless, the requirement on trainees to respond in writing to such observations is an effective device to encourage progress. A profile of the SVUK standards provides a useful summary of trainee competence, but the evidence cited by trainees is of varying specificity and sometimes demonstrates that standards have been addressed rather than achieved. There is no final summative placement report on the standards reached in teaching.

31. Significant improvements have been made to arrangements for moderating the assessment of teaching, including effective sampling by external examiners, a corroboratory assessment visit by the course leader and, in the pre-service course, a subject specialist element. Occasionally, joint observations have not included full discussion and joint debriefing.

32. Assignments are suitably varied, integrate theory and practice effectively, and are marked against assignment-specific criteria. Marking is detailed, accurate, and focused on improving understanding and skills, including literacy. Arrangements for the moderation of the assessment of assignments are exceptionally thorough, are recorded in detail, and include institutional, cross institutional and external examiner judgements. The assignment overload, identified in the analysis of recent trainee evaluations, is being addressed appropriately.

Management and quality assurance of provision

33. The university has an explicit policy on equality and diversity and comprehensive procedures are in place to ensure that this policy is put into practice. Teacher trainers have received relevant professional training and provision gives suitable attention to inclusion. Cohort recruitment and progression data is now interrogated rigorously in order to monitor the effectiveness of the policy on equality and diversity and the partnership manager checks relevant policies in placements during routine visits.

34. Trainee cohorts include an appropriate balance of gender and age. The partnership is now targeting its marketing more effectively and has adjusted its

publicity to present a more dynamic image of teaching in FE, as well as the career opportunities FE presents, including for prospective teachers from minority ethnic groups, for instance by including positive images and case studies. In the case of pre-service recruitment, the university focuses on shortage areas, and also takes account of the availability of subject specialist teacher trainers and placements.

35. All trainees are interviewed, from this year following a more rigorous and consistent process which, in the case of pre-service candidates, involves placement mentors and takes account of subject expertise. The procedures for accrediting the prior experience and learning of in-service candidates are thorough and appropriate. Placement colleges judge pre-service candidates to be well chosen. Generally, success rates and, in the case of pre-service trainees, employment rates are high.

36. The management structure for the partnership is explained clearly and helpfully in the documentation which goes to all partners and trainees. Strategic and day-to-day management are clarified. Partner colleges, as well as trainees, are represented appropriately on relevant committees and thus have opportunities to contribute to course review and planning. However, the management of mentor provision and training across the partnership remains underdeveloped; and opportunities for systematic collaborative development work on key areas such as subject mentoring are still relatively limited. These factors contribute to inconsistencies in trainees' experience and training in the work place.

37. Communication across the partnership is now very effective, supported by a constantly manned telephone line, a range of regular meetings and an increase in visits to colleges by university teacher trainers. More frequent contacts are appreciated by placement and partner college staff and trainees. In general terms roles are understood clearly, even in placement providers new to the partnership; and revised documentation is intended to specify more precisely the different responsibilities of professional and subject mentors, including for training.

38. The sharing of expertise is encouraged. Monitoring visits and partnership meetings identify and share effective practice. Within the school of education, managers ensure that expertise is utilised across programmes. For instance, pre-service provision benefits from the subject expertise of tutors contributing to other courses; and developments in school initial teacher training provision inform partnership practice, in particular the extension of the school initial teacher training data base to include post-compulsory initial teacher training and the introduction of effective monitoring visits by the partnership manager. As yet, however, the identification and dissemination of effective practice across the partnership is not sufficiently systematic.

39. Teacher trainers are suitably qualified and experienced. They undertake relevant professional development and, in some cases, research. Teacher

trainers new to training teams are inducted effectively into their role. Mentors are generally well chosen.

40. Accommodation and resources are mostly appropriate. Within the university, high priority is given to the pre-service route, for instance through priority room booking arrangements. The use of webct to enhance support for trainees and mentors is developing well. In-service trainees have access to university facilities. However, the availability of ICT for central training and for trainees to use when teaching varies between institutions.

41. The university system of quality assurance was commended in the most recent Quality Assurance Agency audit. The school of education and the teacher training team operate this system with helpful flexibility to take account of external requirements related to teacher training.

42. A wide range of suitable data is used to inform the annual review and action planning process, including written trainee evaluations which now take account of placement experiences. The partnership review also draws on the individual reviews and action planning of each partner college. In the case of the pre-service route, formal trainee representation arrangements are very effective in presenting trainee views. A number of recently introduced procedures have extended further the range and reliability of evidence, for instance formal records of completed workplace requirements, systematic and carefully recorded monitoring visits by the partnership manager, and the increased number of visits to placements by the course leader. The partnership is also making strenuous efforts to identify and employ relevant benchmarking data.

43. The partnership is increasingly aware of the inconsistencies of practice noted above, for instance related to mentoring, and intervenes where trainee progress is undermined. A well structured and highly appropriate action plan has been developed as a response to the feedback at the end of the first stage of the inspection.

44. To date, annual reviews have lacked a sufficiently sharp analytical edge. Action plans, while suitably focused and with clearly defined outcomes and success criteria, do not yet include details of monitoring, evaluation or review arrangements. The new evidence-based approach to annual review, now adopted by the wider university, provides a useful context for addressing these issues.

Appendix list of colleges

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

- Basingstoke College of Technology
- Chichester College of Arts, Science and Technology
- Eastleigh College
- South Downs College