

Further Education Teacher Training

University of Teesside

Middlesbrough
Cleveland
TS1 3BA

Inspection report
2005/06

Managing Inspector:
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The inspection

1. The inspection was undertaken in two phases by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors, a full time inspector from the Adult Learning Inspectorate and two specialist additional inspectors. The first phase of the inspection took place in January 2006 when inspectors focussed on the quality of training and the management and quality assurance of provision. In the second phase, which took place in June 2006, inspectors evaluated the teaching of trainees nearing the end of their programmes. Inspectors looked at evidence from a diverse range of sources including the observation of teaching and learning, interviews with staff and trainees, examination of trainees' work, and other documentation from both the college and the university. The inspection concluded in July 2006.

Background

2. The University of Teesside works closely with Stockton Riverside College to offer teaching qualifications in post – compulsory education. Trainees undertake the certificate in education (Cert.Ed) or postgraduate certificate in education (PGCE) courses. The part-time in-service course is of two years duration and there is a one year full-time pre-service course. The part-time two year programme recruits on alternate years, so at the time of inspection only trainees in their second year were present.

3. Pre-service trainees undertake teaching practice placements on one day each week. In-service trainees are required to have at least 60 hours of teaching each year. In order to follow the PGCE route trainees must be graduates and successfully undertake an additional two modules in the final year. Trainees are able to progress onto the second year of the part-time course directly from the college's national awarding body qualification, the City & Guilds 7407 course.

4. The distinctive feature of the Cert.Ed/PGCE course is that, while a generic qualification, the course content and structure are designed for those who teach, or plan to teach, Skills for Life (SfL); literacy, numeracy or English for speakers of other languages (ESOL). In addition, one year specialist part-time courses are offered. These courses, known as the university certificate in advanced professional development (UCAPD) are intended for SfL subject specialists, and can be taken either alongside the Cert Ed/PGCE courses, or as continuing professional development. Pre-service Cert Ed/PGCE trainees have the opportunity to progress to the UCAPD the year after they complete their generic teaching qualification. The UCAPD courses have either an adult literacy, numeracy or ESOL specialism.

5. Both UCAPD and Cert.Ed/PGCE courses are endorsed qualifications which meet the requirements of the Secretary of State for Further Education (FE) teachers. With the exception of the UCAPD ESOL course, all provision is

delivered wholly by and within Stockton Riverside College. Most teaching is done by college staff and courses are validated by the university.

Effectiveness of provision

6. The overall quality of provision is adequate (grade 3). The combination of a Cert Ed/PGCE along with a specialist SfL course is effective, enabling trainees to develop appropriate knowledge and skills. Trainees are generally well taught, although links between theory and practice are not always fully explored. A few trainees make insufficient progress given their starting point at the beginning of the course and some do not have a sufficiently wide range of teaching in their placements or workplace. Pre-service trainees usually do not fully develop their subject specialist knowledge until they complete the UCAPD course. The partnership has generally good systems to ensure the quality of what it does and it engenders a positive culture of development and change. It has responded very well to the interim feedback of the inspection, though many of the changes introduced have not had sufficient time to have an impact on trainees' experiences. Across the partnership, managers and trainers are aware of the strengths and weaknesses of the provision, and are willing to try new approaches so they can improve what they do.

Key Strengths

Inspectors identified the following strengths:

- good opportunities for trainees to develop Skills for Life expertise, particularly when they complete both the generic Cert Ed/PGCE and the UCAPD
- effective partnership working and good communications between university and college
- quality assurance procedures that ensure accurate assessment practice across the partnership
- high quality resources and course documentation that support training both at university and college

Areas for attention

The partnership should address:

- the lack of opportunities for some trainees to teach across a range of provision
- uneven access to mentor support to assist trainees in the development of their subject specific knowledge and skills
- the variable extent to which trainees have the opportunity to participate in curriculum development and tutorship
- insufficient progress made by some trainees given their experience at the start of the course

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

Achievements of trainees

7. Most trainees make satisfactory progress. They form good working relationships with their students and recognise their social and learning needs. They generally present positive role models. While they are committed to completing the qualification, some struggle to balance the demands of the course with contracted teaching hours, sometimes in the absence of routine access to support in the workplace. Typically, trainees care about their students and try hard to ensure that they succeed and progress.

8. With a few exceptions, trainees' confidence grows during their course. The vast majority are keen to extend their experience of the sector, by teaching across a range of provision. However, the opportunity to do so is not always readily available. For some, teaching practice is restricted to work with small groups or individual students. Trainees are not always able to participate in course development or extended planning. The partnership recognises this, and is taking steps to broaden trainees' teaching experiences for next year.

9. Trainees generally develop appropriate subject specific knowledge and skills in literacy, numeracy or ESOL, particularly when undertaking the UCAPD. However, pre-service trainees, while completing the Cert Ed/PGCE, often have limited subject specialist knowledge and this impacts on the extent to which they can be effective teachers of literacy, numeracy or ESOL early on in their course.

10. Trainees vary significantly in the extent to which they use information and learning technology (ILT) in their lessons. Many trainees have little experience of how ILT can be used effectively to enhance teaching and learning.

11. Sessions taught by trainees are usually well planned. In most examples, the structure of the session is clear and allows for flexibility and the consolidation of learning. Sessions generally fit well into the overall scheme of work, though in a minority of examples there are insufficient links between the content of the individual session and the wider scheme. Some plans have too much emphasis on teaching activities and too little emphasis on outcomes. In these sessions there is insufficient consideration of what students will be able to do at the end of the session compared to what they could do at the beginning.

12. Most trainees use a variety of teaching techniques to stimulate their students; although the individual learning needs of the more and less able students are not always recognised. Work is insufficiently tailored to meet the needs of students of different abilities in the same group. Trainees do not, as a matter of routine, have a good appreciation of the prior attainment of their learners. As a consequence the more able students do not always progress as well as they should.

13. Trainees' skills in the assessment and monitoring of students' progress are broadly satisfactory. However, overall experiences of assessment practice are too variable. For example some trainees have a very good understanding of the use of a variety of assessment techniques and these are well integrated into the structure of their sessions and courses. Others do not have the opportunity to include a sufficiently broad range of assessment in their planning. Trainees who have a role within a course team generally gain access to a wider range of practical assessment.

14. Typically, trainees support their students well and are committed to helping them to succeed. Most trainees have a good knowledge of the support available to students within their own institutions. However, they rarely have the opportunity to use this knowledge as not all of them act as personal or course tutors.

Quality of Training

15. The structure of the Cert Ed/PGCE course has been carefully planned to meet the requirements of the Further Education National Training Organisation (FENTO) teaching standards. The Cert Ed/PGCE is designed to develop generic teaching skills but trainees also complete the UCAPD in literacy, numeracy or ESOL as an integral component of their course. The requirements of the minimum core curriculum in literacy, language and numeracy are explicitly mapped within the Cert Ed/PGCE phase.

16. Trainees are provided with helpful and comprehensive documentation which explains the expectations of the course and details of its structure clearly. Modules are designed to build essential teaching skills quickly. Assignments are linked to workplace experience. The implementation of the taught element of the training programmes is generally good.

17. An expressed intention indicates that trainees have nominated mentors in their placement or workplace to help them develop subject specific teaching skills. Guidance for mentors and trainees is clear, and explains their role well. However, trainees have very variable experiences of the extent to which they benefit from this arrangement. Communications between mentor and tutor are not sufficiently well developed. Although trainees have an entitlement to meet mentors twice each year this does not always occur. The partnership recognises these issues and has taken steps to improve them; for example by recently establishing a mentor focus group. The university offers training for mentors, but in the current year around 40% of mentors had not undertaken any training.

18. Course modules appropriately draw on trainees' teaching experiences. In-service trainees are required to have current teaching in SfL and work placements support the development of pre-service trainees' skills. In a few examples placements have not been well matched to pre-service trainees' preferred area of teaching. More generally, trainees are not given sufficient opportunity to teach across a range of contexts and levels. For a few trainees the breadth of their experience is limited to a single group, or level of course, by the nature of their employment or placement. Trainees do not always gain experience of the wider aspects of the curriculum, for example in planning and progress monitoring.

19. Courses are well designed and delivered to enable trainees to meet the university qualification requirements. Sessions have a good mix of whole group and small group activity. Explanations are clear and learning is checked effectively. Good use is made of trainees' experience so that others can benefit from hearing about different approaches. Good links are made to teaching practice within most sessions and trainees contribute effectively. However, in UCAPD literacy and ESOL, trainers do not fully exploit opportunities to demonstrate techniques which might be used in trainees' own Skills for Life teaching. The most effective ways in which theory might be put into practice are not always modelled.

20. Accommodation is well equipped with visual aids, including interactive whiteboards. ILT resources are good. Trainees have access to free summer courses, including IT, prior to the start of their training. Learning resources are satisfactory, with a range of texts and journals in the college and at the university. However, the Skills for Life collection is located in the university and, as such, few trainees find it convenient to access. The college is currently improving its own virtual learning environment so that it contains more useful content for trainees. Trainers are suitably qualified, and are able

to take advantage of many professional development activities at both college and university.

21. Trainees are helped to evaluate their own professional practice and to set targets for their future career. All trainees are assessed to identify their literacy, numeracy and language support needs early in their course. Support sessions are available in cases of identified need. However, the take-up of this support is low, and mechanisms for monitoring whether trainees attend are not well developed. Both the college and the university have a good range of support services available. For example, a drop-in skills centre and specialist support for dyslexia.

22. Trainees are encouraged to evaluate their own professional practice through teaching logs and reflective diaries. They are responsible for maintaining a progress file which is not formally assessed and this is not always completed systematically. Communication between mentors and tutors is not well developed, so they do not always have a comprehensive view of trainees' overall progress. However, trainees value the support they receive and find tutors accessible and helpful.

23. Course handbooks explain assessment requirements well. Deadlines for handing in assignments are specified and trainees are clear about what is expected of them. The partnership has taken steps to ensure consistency in assessment, and written feedback on marked assignments is generally good. However, in a minority of examples it is insufficiently detailed to enable the trainee to have a clear understanding of what they should do to improve.

24. Trainees undertake a minimum of six observed teaching sessions in certificate courses, and three for UCAPD courses. Feedback from these sessions is often comprehensive and clearly evaluates strengths and weaknesses. There is an appropriate emphasis on the effectiveness of students' learning as well as what the trainee did. Trainees value these sessions, however lesson observations by mentors are not carried out in a timely or systematic way.

Management and quality assurance of provision

25. The college and the university work well together in the running of these courses and in the management of the partnership. A clear committee and meeting structure has been developed to facilitate the process and this operates smoothly. Roles and responsibilities are clear, and the deployment of resources is effective. Professional development opportunities for trainees based at Stockton College are fully integrated with the good overall professional opportunities offered to college staff. Education provision has good links with the college's human resources function.

26. College and university staff are fully involved in the selection process. The information given to trainees about the courses is accurate and well presented. The application form requires the recording of important information, such as whether placement arrangements have been established and whether a trainee has specific learning needs. Trainees are interviewed and tested for their literacy and numeracy skills to assess their suitability for the training. All relevant checks are made, including checking documentary evidence of levels of prior attainment and criminal record bureau (CRB) checks. Only those trainees with the relevant qualifications are recruited to the courses.

27. However, beyond the initial screening tests, there is limited formal identification of training needs at this stage. Trainees are not generally required to undertake further development activities prior to the commencement of the courses.

28. Both the college and the university take appropriate steps to monitor equality and diversity issues. The university has been closely involved in a successful project to recruit Skills for Life trainees from ethnic minorities, ex-schoolteachers, and recent graduates. The partnership has well defined equal opportunities and diversity policies but these are not prominent in the documentation, publicity materials or in the selection process.

29. Quality assurance procedures are clear. These have been shared, agreed and recorded in the manual that supports the operation and development of the partnership. Procedures for external moderation and verification are generally thorough. External examiners report in detail on the courses on an annual basis. Managers respond swiftly to points for action. In response to previous criticisms about the moderation of trainees' practical teaching, course leaders have arranged to make joint observations with examiners. Although some internal moderation of practical teaching takes place, this is not organised systematically and the mechanisms for recording the outcomes of such observations focus on procedures rather than quality. Marking on assignments is checked, though a few inconsistencies remain; for example, in applying university assessment criteria and in the standard of written feedback.

30. Both the university and college operate a system for monitoring the quality of teaching. The university has a peer review system and the college operates a more formal observation system. Coordinators have begun the process of cross partnership observation to moderate and assure quality.

31. Staff professional development arrangements are strong in both the university and college, and include mandatory training for all staff in equal opportunities and diversity. Managers and tutors have been prepared well for the new procedures and responsibilities brought about by the recent move of education to the school of social sciences & law.

32. The partnership has not yet ensured that trainees' experiences of mentoring have been consistently effective. As a consequence too many trainees have not received the extent of subject specific support they need. Both college and university recognise this and have recently begun to introduce changes to ensure improved consistency in the future. These changes include moderation of mentors' teaching observations of trainees, and improvements to mentor training. However it is too soon to be sure that these changes will significantly improve trainees' experiences.

33. A range of mechanisms are used for evaluating and improving the quality of training. These include feedback from trainees, tutors, programme leaders and external examiners. The partnership has also responded swiftly to issues identified early in the inspection and has begun to introduce many changes to address them. For example, it has introduced improved procedures for the moderation of the observation of trainees' practical teaching. However, it is too soon for these initiatives to have impacted significantly on the experiences of current trainees.