Further Education Teacher Training

University of Lancaster

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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 a full-time inspector from the Adult Learning Inspectorate and a specialist additional inspector. Inspectors focused on the quality of training and on 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 FE trainees nearing the end of the programmes, through observing their teaching and gathering evidence of their progress through the course. Phase two of the inspection was completed in early July 2006.

Background

2.   This inspection was carried out in accordance with the framework for the inspection 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.

3.   Lancaster University, in conjunction with Blackpool and the Fylde College, provides initial teacher training courses for further education (FE) teachers and other trainers from the post-compulsory sector, leading to the award of either the post-graduate certificate in education (PGCE) or the professional certificate in education (PCE). Both are endorsed qualifications and satisfy the Secretary of State's requirements for FE teacher training. Two training routes are available: a full-time pre-service course, on which there are 40 trainees, and a part-time in-service course, on which there are 91 trainees.

4.   The university works with the college in designing and developing the programmes, which are then delivered by college staff. The university validates and has the responsibility of assuring the quality of the programmes.

Effectiveness of provision

5.   The overall quality of provision is good (grade 2). Both in-service and pre-service trainees are motivated and reflective practitioners who demonstrate well-developed skills of lesson planning. The great majority of trainees make good progress in developing their practical and theoretical knowledge throughout the course, and become confident and knowledgeable teachers. Although the college audits trainees' skills in literacy, numeracy, language and information and communication technology (ICT) at the start of the course, procedures for addressing weaknesses and monitoring the development of these skills are not sufficiently rigorous; this is reflected in the

lack of confidence in some aspects of minimum core skills evident in a minority of trainees. The structure and content of both the pre-service and in-service courses are good, and trainees benefit from good quality delivery of the taught programme. With very few exceptions, college-based teacher trainers provide good quality support for trainees; however, the tutorial programme is not always sufficiently coherent, and does not effectively draw together all available evidence on trainees' progress in monitoring development and setting targets. The college recognises the importance of developing specialist mentoring skills and has successfully carried out some good quality work in training and supporting mentors, both within and outside the college. However, there is scope for the further development of mentoring, especially for those mentors who work in institutions outside the college. Systems for assuring the quality of mentoring are now being implemented, but are still in the early stages of development.

Key strengths

Inspectors identified the following strengths:

- highly motivated trainees, who are reflective practitioners, know their subjects well and provide good quality support to their students

- the well designed structure and content of courses, including assignments

- the college's virtual learning environment, which is used very effectively by both trainers and trainees to support the programmes

- the great majority of the feedback given to trainees, both on lesson observations and assignments, which is constructive and helpful, and in some cases exemplifies excellent practice

- the effective management of the programmes carried out by a committed and enthusiastic team of teacher trainers

- the good progress made by the college in developing specialist mentoring skills

- the strong and well-established links between Lancaster University and Blackpool and the Fylde College, exemplified by a rigorous and effective quality assurance system.

Areas for attention

The partnership should address:

- underdeveloped systems for tracking the development of trainees' minimum core skills of literacy, numeracy, language and ICT

- the limited effectiveness of the tutorial system in gathering and reviewing all available evidence on trainees' progress in a systematic and coherent manner

- a small minority of weak mentors.

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

Achievement of trainees

6.   All trainees are highly motivated teachers. They are reflective and self-critical, keen to improve their practice through self-evaluation; the majority give careful consideration to advice and feedback from their trainers and use this effectively to develop their teaching skills. Most evaluations show that trainees have good analytical skills and think carefully about how they might address specific weaknesses; for example, through focused self-study, or by seeking advice from colleagues other than their college-based trainers and mentors. However, a very small minority of trainees' lesson evaluations show that trainees do not always focus sufficiently on students' learning.

7.   Trainees have secure subject knowledge and are familiar with the programmes of study that they are expected to deliver. Most are research and refresh their subject knowledge in relation to particular curriculum needs. They use knowledge gained through previous work experience effectively; for example, one trainee has excellent interpersonal skills gained through working with disaffected school pupils, and has adapted these skills very successfully to match the requirements of her teaching placement in a prison. However, a minority of trainees lack confidence in some aspects of the minimum core skills of literacy, numeracy, language and ICT; for instance, one trainee had only basic level skills in ICT, and found it difficult to develop these, partly due to limited resources in her teaching placement. A few trainees do not always gain a great deal of experience of teaching their main subject; for example, one trainee who was a history specialist mainly taught basic skills.

8.   Lesson planning is a significant strength. Clear objectives and learning outcomes are identified, even in situations where the transient nature of a

particular teaching group can present difficulties in planning learning. Trainees are aware of student progression and plan carefully for the development of skills. The great majority of trainees carefully consider the needs of individual students at the planning stage, identifying appropriate strategies and resources for differentiated learning. A small minority of trainees, however, do not pay sufficient attention to the individual learning needs of their students, especially the more able students; this is reflected in both planning and delivery. Almost all trainees' plans include details of appropriate assessment strategies.

9.   Trainees are aware of a variety of teaching strategies and use these well. The majority are able to explain concepts in a variety of ways to help students understand. The most able trainees consistently provide clear explanations of appropriately pitched work, enabling students both to achieve and enjoy. When teaching practical subjects, most trainees adopt an interactive approach that involves all students and is very successful in developing their skills. Trainees demonstrate good group management skills, and ensure that all students are fully engaged in the lesson, even when some present challenging behaviour. They are aware of health and safety issues relating to their working environment and the subject areas being taught. Almost all trainees use a range of resources, including information and learning technology (ILT), effectively to support learning, and the most highly attaining trainees constantly seek opportunities for students to enhance their basic skills. They are committed to increasing students' confidence and encouraging them to complete courses of study.

10.   Almost all trainees use questioning skilfully in order to assess students' understanding, and the highest attaining trainees follow this up with more individualised checks through one-to-one intervention at various stages of the lesson. This information is used well in order to identify ways in which individual students can improve their work. Where trainees are teaching examination courses, appropriate reference is made to requirements and students are assessed accordingly. The best trainees keep detailed records of their students' achievements, and are acutely aware of how to extend access and support. Overall, the quality of support provided by trainees for their students is high. All trainees ensure that their students have full access to the programmes of study.

Quality of training

11.   The content of the courses meets the requirements of the Further Education National Training Organisation (FENTO) teaching standards and the minimum core curriculum. Programmes are well planned to ensure coherence with a good balance between general and subject specific training. Appropriate emphasis is placed upon the link between theoretical work and the development of pedagogical skills. Trainees develop a thorough awareness of current issues in the post-compulsory sector, for example, skills

for life, throughout the programme. The majority of trainees are placed within Blackpool and the Fylde College, with others working in institutions such as sixth form colleges, community learning centres and prisons. Trainers know their trainees well, and are keen to provide good quality support throughout the programme.

12.   Assignments support the training very effectively, being structured around a logical progression of foundation and development. They encourage trainees to investigate relevant reading and research, formulate and present ideas and arguments, and develop extended writing skills. Trainees are encouraged to be self-evaluative, and the use of reflected journals supports this.

13.   Overall, the quality of college-based training is good. The best sessions effectively model good practice, for example by sharing outcomes at the outset and reviewing progress against these outcomes. Teacher trainers use a variety of teaching styles, and there is an appropriate level of challenge. However, a minority of sessions lack clarity and focus in the tasks and expected outcomes.

14.   Resources at the college are good. A dedicated room for ILT is available to support the development of trainees' skills, for example, in the use of interactive whiteboards. The college has made excellent progress this year in the development of a virtual learning environment, which is used very effectively by teacher trainers and trainees to support the programmes. All course materials are accessible through the virtual learning environment which also contains a range of high quality resources for teaching. Additionally, trainees and teacher trainers have access to discussion forums that are used for peer support and the sharing of best practice. This valuable resource is being developed and extended further, and its wider use – for example, by off-site mentors – is being promoted.

15.   Teacher trainers have a clear understanding of their roles and responsibilities, and, overall, college staff provide a good standard of academic and pastoral support. There is an established tutorial system, which enables teacher trainers and trainees to review progress at key points during the course, and trainees clearly appreciate the opportunity to discuss their work. However, the current system does not always draw together all available evidence on trainees' progress, and therefore lacks coherence. Feedback from mentors, and trainees' evaluative work, are not consistently scrutinised and considered when assessing trainees' progress. There is also a good deal of variability in the quality of tutorial records; too many lack sufficient detail. This impacts negatively on the quality of target setting for some trainees.

16.   Almost all of the feedback given to trainees is constructive and helpful. Some examples of feedback exemplify excellent practice; for example, one

trainer engaged in an inspiring and thought provoking dialogue with a trainee based on the content of the trainee's assignment. The best feedback from lesson observations is extremely focused, with clear judgements and suggestions for improvement. In a small minority of cases, feedback is too superficial and lacks focus.

17. The provider rightly places much emphasis on the importance of mentoring and has made good progress in developing mentors' skills. The majority of mentors share the subject specialisms of their trainees. They are very positive about their role, with most viewing mentoring as an important element of their own professional development. Most mentors, both in and outside the college, willingly give time to train and support their trainees; they display a secure understanding of the course structure and understand their roles and responsibilities well. Regular recorded meetings are held with trainees, in addition to the provision of much informal feedback and advice. However, a few mentors are unsure about their roles, and lack understanding of the programmes.

18. Trainees' skills in literacy, numeracy, language and ICT are audited at the outset of the course and weaknesses are identified. However, systems for tracking the development of these skills lack rigour. Most trainees are conscientious in engaging in self study as appropriate, and log their progress. However, the process is not currently monitored sufficiently by teacher trainers; consequently, a minority of trainees lack confidence in some areas of minimum core skills.

19. Assessment procedures are well-defined and understood by trainees and teacher trainers; full account is taken of the balance between practical and theoretical skills. The assessment of practical teaching is based on a number of formal observations carried out by the college-based trainer, plus one subject specialist observation carried out by a mentor. Criteria for the marking of assignments are linked to FENTO standards; all assignments are double-marked, thus helping to ensure consistency. There are clear arrangements for trainees' referrals and suspensions from the course.

Management and quality assurance of provision

20. Procedures for the recruitment and selection of trainees are secure, and well-integrated into college systems. The college has a clear expectation that new staff without a teaching qualification will begin the in-service course within an agreed period. Recently, the college has taken steps to widen participation in the programmes by increased advertising; course information on the college website has also been updated. Candidates are given sound advice on appropriate programmes, and there are defined criteria for the selection of trainees. The college is successful in recruiting trainees from minority ethnic backgrounds.

21.   The training programmes are managed effectively by committed and enthusiastic staff. Roles and responsibilities are clearly defined; individual teacher trainers are allocated the responsibility for the management of particular aspects of the training. Regular team meetings ensure that teacher trainers are fully aware of current issues, and work collaboratively on course development.

22.   The college has made good progress in developing the skills of mentors. Training sessions for mentors emphasise the importance of subject specific support for trainees and the majority of mentors are fully aware of the college's expectations. The use of the virtual learning environment by mentors, with the intention of increasing awareness and improving communication, is being encouraged, and there is early evidence of some success in this area. College staff have begun to develop procedures for assuring the quality of mentoring; for example, by carrying out joint observations with mentors, both in and outside the college.

23.   There is a clear placement agreement, which is used for placements in different departments within the college as well as those provided by external partners.

24.   Each programme manager is responsible for programme review and evaluation throughout the year and is required to produce an action plan. The quality of action planning is good overall, and impact of actions is monitored regularly throughout the year. The college gathers evaluative information from trainees, mentors, and a range of other sources, and uses this effectively to inform development.

25.   Overall, quality assurance procedures are very rigorous and effective. Lancaster University plays a major role in assuring the overall quality of the programmes, and this constitutes a significant strength. The university employs a course consultant who works closely with the college-based team. He is responsible for monitoring the academic rigour of the programmes, including mapping against the FENTO standards, as well as playing an active role in all aspects of programme development.   The course consultant informs university staff of progress and developments, and submits a formal annual report. There is also a formal review process involving a wider team of university staff, who challenge and explore relevant issues in detail with college staff. The university appoints the programme's external examiner, and issues emerging from the examiner's report are carefully considered by staff in both institutions.

Appendix list of colleges

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

- Blackpool & the Fylde College

- Edge Hill College of HE