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University of Northumbria

**Better
education
and care**

Coach Lane Campus
Newcastle upon Tyne
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A primary initial teacher training
short inspection report
2006/07

Managing inspector
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Introduction

Northumbria University works in partnership with approximately 200 schools to provide primary and early years initial teacher training (ITT) courses. It offers a three-year BA (Hons) in Early Primary Education; a one-year professional certificate in education (PGCE) Primary Education; and a flexible one or two-year professional certificate in education (PGCE) Early Years and Primary Education. At the time of the inspection there were 464 trainees.

Context

The inspection was carried out by a team of inspectors in accordance with the *Ofsted Handbook for the Inspection of Initial Teacher Training (2005-2011)*.

This report draws on evidence from a short inspection of the provision and an inspection of the management and quality assurance arrangements.

Grades are awarded in accordance with the following scale

| | |
|---------|--------------|
| Grade 1 | Outstanding |
| Grade 2 | Good |
| Grade 3 | Satisfactory |
| Grade 4 | Inadequate |

Main inspection judgements

Management and quality assurance: Grade 1

The overall quality of training is at least good.

The provider will receive a short inspection in three years.

Key strengths

- high calibre trainers, resulting in high quality training
- the strength of the partnership
- the wide range of training opportunities offered by the partnership
- rigorous self-evaluation and action planning
- very good selection procedures, ensuring the recruitment of high quality trainees
- high quality communication with and guidance for schools.

Point for consideration

- resolution of minor inconsistencies in the application of agreed procedures across all programmes and modules, to ensure even greater coherence.

The quality of training

1. The quality of training remains high. Close consultation with schools about how best to prepare trainees has ensured that amendments and additions to the programmes have enhanced the provision and kept the university in step with national and local developments. A good example, on the postgraduate programme, is an introduction to the teaching of French to children in primary schools.

2. The content of the programmes is comprehensive, up-to-date and intellectually rigorous. It meets the Requirements and is designed well to enable trainees to meet the Standards. Trainees respond very positively to the increasing level of challenge built into training sessions, assignments and school-based activity. Many produce work of a high quality and develop a strong ability to reflect critically on their experiences and the experience of others. This skill is prompted by the required completion of a cumulative learning journal which feeds into assignments, the assessment of progress towards meeting the Standards and the setting of targets. The increased use of electronic communication this year has strengthened further the links in the learning community, especially for those trainees on the flexible postgraduate programme. Through this medium trainees benefit from easy access to a wealth of materials, readings, module and session content as well as the outcomes of tasks completed by peers.

3. The generous time spent by trainees in schools is arranged well to give them experience of a variety of contexts complementing their chosen age range. Undergraduate trainees' first placement is in a non-school early years setting; this underlines the early focus in the taught modules on how very young children learn and the work of multi-professional teams in meeting their needs. School-based tasks and teaching experiences are closely tied to the taught modules, and the cyclical nature of the programmes ensures that trainees develop a firm understanding of the links between theory and practice. While professional studies forms the spine of the programmes, due attention is given to the core and foundation subjects. The modules on advanced studies in the early years for undergraduate trainees reinforce key principles and practice in working with young children.

4. Trainees are prepared thoroughly to teach English, mathematics and science and they are strongly encouraged to improve their subject knowledge. In English, they have access to very detailed support material online and, as in mathematics and science, extra sessions ensure trainees feel confident to take the required skills tests.

5. Trainees gain a secure grounding in the development of listening and speaking skills as well as in early reading and writing. The current debate about the teaching of phonics is covered well and visiting practitioners illustrate effective practice in aspects of the teaching of literacy. The focus on how to teach skills is also prevalent in mathematics and science but practice is more variable in the foundation subjects. The use of the e-learning portal and link with a primary school

has provided trainees with good opportunities to view live science teaching and to engage with the science coordinator and school training coordinator in evaluating the outcomes. The agreement between trainees, tutors and school staff, on the focus for these sessions, has heightened the trainees' understanding of how to teach investigative science.

6. The undergraduate programme has several distinctive aspects. Centre and school-based trainers have jointly developed initiatives to ensure that trainees are well versed in diversity and inclusion matters. The well-planned links with Newham local authority give trainees the opportunity to observe inclusive education. Trainees also undertake a taxing two-week school placement to carry out tasks in teaching and assessing children's learning in English and mathematics. The modules on 'Learning, Teaching and Creativity' reflect the *Every Child Matters* agenda and the good practice identified in *Excellence and Enjoyment*.

7. The high quality support provided by school-based trainers is facilitated by clear, comprehensive handbooks, with structured guidance on evaluating trainees' progress in meeting the Standards. Trainees receive constructive feedback on their teaching, although the feedback and agreed targets are not always sufficiently explicit or subject-specific to ensure rapid improvement. The marking of their assignments is thorough but there have been minor inconsistencies in the marking by visiting lecturers. Trainees are given good quality and helpful guidance at every opportunity; this enables them to evaluate their own progress in meeting the Standards and, as a result, they understand well how they are performing. The best tutoring engages trainees in intellectual debate, where they are given further references and challenges. The linking of assignments, tasks and training sessions to the Standards enables trainees to draw on all their experiences in presenting evidence of their progress and completing their career entry and development profile.

8. Course guidance on equal opportunities and race equality is regularly reviewed in line with the university policy. Support groups for male trainees and minority ethnic groups provide helpful networks where any concerns can be raised. These features are indicative of the high quality of support for individual trainees.

Management and quality assurance

9. Selection procedures are very good. Documentation relating to the courses gives very clear information on requirements and expectations, particularly emphasising the need to gain school experience prior to commencing training. Applications are scrutinised against a clear set of criteria emphasising high standards. The university hosts taster days at which current trainees are available to advise candidates on the strengths and demands of the course. The university's strong links with colleges and sixth forms enable them to work directly with different communities in their drive to recruit trainees from minority ethnic groups. A rigorous interview process involves partnership schools in the selection of suitable

candidates. Training for members of the partnership in interview techniques is a requirement before schools are allowed to participate in the process. An agreed set of criteria identifies the suitability of candidates. Retention rates for all three routes are good.

10. The course is very well managed and there is a strong commitment to developing excellent teachers. The partnership's clearly articulated philosophy is shared effectively and leads to high quality training. The partnership handbook is an excellent document, compiled by representatives from all sides and providing clear definitions of roles and responsibilities. A recent development to extend the partnership to 0-3 and Early Years' settings enables trainees to gain a wider experience of the *Every Child Matters* agenda. Schools are keen to be members of the partnership and fully understand the criteria for selection and deselection. A significant feature is the condition that schools must attend mentor training prior to each placement.

11. Schools are involved at all levels in the design, delivery and evaluation of the courses. For example, the English and Mathematics Development Group has contributed to the design of focussed placements in English and mathematics. Members of the partnership take on the role of visiting lecturer and deliver centre and school-based training. Arrangements for communicating with training school staff are very good, largely because schools are organised into geographical clusters.

12. Regular evaluations by the university are acted upon quickly and effectively, with information disseminated rapidly through the e-communications portal and cluster meetings. Individual programme leaders and their colleagues are effective in identifying areas of strength and weaknesses in their respective courses. For example, a proposed module on diversity in the classroom provides an exciting development for trainees by offering options in creativity and placements in special schools. The quality of training by university staff is regularly monitored. However, in a small number of cases minor inconsistencies in, for example, the marking of assignments by visiting lecturers, were undetected. Following all school placements and centre-based training, trainees have the opportunity to feed back both formally and informally. The provider responds swiftly to the feedback and trainees have been able to see changes on the strength of their recommendations. For example, the timing of the undergraduate trainees' placements linked to assignments has been altered so that trainees have the school experience prior to the assignment.

13. The use of cross-moderation by school-based staff ensures consistency in the assessment of trainees' pedagogical skills. The external examiner's report is of good quality and ensures action is successful in addressing identified areas for improvement. Where decisions are made not to follow up recommendations, programme managers present a clear rationale. Thorough self-evaluation takes place through periodic and annual reviews. Associated action planning is very clearly focused on improvements, course priorities and outcomes for trainees.