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University of Durham

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Old Shire Hall
Durham
DH1 3HP

A secondary initial teacher training
short inspection report
2006/07

Managing inspector
Derek Neil HMI

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Introduction

The University of Durham works in partnership with over 120 schools to provide secondary initial teacher training. It offers PGCE courses for the 11-16 age range in English, geography, history, mathematics, modern languages, music, physical education, religious education, and science. At the time of the inspection there were 250 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 2

The overall quality of training is at least good.

The provider will receive a short inspection in three years.

Key strengths

- the strength of the partnership with schools
- the course's challenging and up-to-date content
- the effectiveness of the school-based training
- the coherence of the course, achieved through integration of all its components and a well struck balance of theory and practice
- recruitment procedures, which result in the selection of very able trainees
- tutors' close knowledge of the schools in which they place trainees
- the careful assessment of trainees' progress and the robust arrangements for moderating their final assessment.

Points for consideration

- making evaluation of the course more rigorous
- basing improvement plans more firmly on the results of course evaluation
- improving the use of the virtual learning environment
- improving the accommodation for central training sessions.

The quality of training

1. The course is structured well. The content is up-to-date, comprehensive, and systematically linked to the Standards. Since the last inspection, a number of initiatives have brought about improvements in the content; for example, the geography course includes more emphasis on high-order thinking skills, and the science course features some work with a local arts project designed to raise trainees' awareness of creativity in science teaching. There are strong links between theory and practice throughout the course; the very challenging work encourages trainees to develop both pedagogical and academic skills. One trainee accurately described the course as "highly academic, but still firmly rooted in classroom practice."
2. Coherence between the various elements of the training is a strength. Generic sessions are followed up systematically by relevant subject-specific training, and links between centre-based and school-based programmes are clear and effective.
3. The overall quality of university-based training is good. Subject tutors are skilled and knowledgeable, and training sessions consistently model effective practice. In mathematics, for example, the tutor's high-quality planning and evaluation for each session are shared with trainees. Although most of the accommodation at the university is at least adequate, teaching rooms do not always exemplify stimulating learning environments. Some are not well resourced; for example, some lack commonly used information and communications technology equipment. The room used most frequently for whole-course generic sessions is not fit for purpose and this has a negative impact on that part of training; some trainees were unable to hear the speaker, for example.
4. Subject tutors work successfully with partnership schools in offering central training. For instance, music trainees visit a school with expertise in music technology, and science trainees regularly visit the science learning centre at a partner school. Courses feature an effective balance of tutor-led sessions, peer teaching, and contributions from external speakers. Peer teaching is often used very effectively to support the development of subject knowledge; for example, by pairing trainees who have knowledge and expertise in different areas and encouraging them to learn from each other. A virtual learning environment for trainees has been introduced, but there is currently too much variability in its use across subjects. While mathematics and modern languages trainees find it useful, particularly as a means of sharing resources, in some other subjects the availability of materials is limited.
5. Trainees are matched well to schools. Much thought is given to the suitability of placements, with the intention of providing an appropriate level of challenge. The English tutors, for example, have planned to send a trainee with weaknesses in his knowledge of literature to a very academic school with a large sixth form for the second placement. The school-based training is highly effective.

School tutors and subject mentors are very committed to their work as trainers; they have a clear understanding of their roles and responsibilities and provide strong support and guidance for trainees. A number of schools organise high-quality training programmes that are based on their distinctive strengths. For example, one science department was particularly successful in incorporating its own work on assessment for learning into the training programme. Another school, which was especially well placed to provide training on inclusion, was able to cater for a trainee keen to develop her expertise in this area. In all schools, trainees get regular opportunities to observe high quality teaching.

6. Procedures for auditing trainees' subject knowledge at the start of the course have been enhanced since the last inspection. Improvements in the audit and the arrangements for developing subject knowledge have been particularly notable in religious education. Audits are good and are used well in almost all subjects. Trainers start to gather information on trainees' strengths and weaknesses at the selection stage. Although the trainees are responsible for monitoring the development of their own subject knowledge, trainers provide good support and guidance.

7. The assessment of trainees' progress is accurate and rigorous. Trainers have a good understanding of the Standards and are confident in assessing trainees' teaching. The formal and informal feedback given to trainees is good; advice is constructive and helpful, and often incorporates realistic strategies for the further development of teaching skills. Specific targets for development, related to the Standards, are discussed and recorded, and followed up in subsequent observations and meetings. Trainees are fully aware of their current targets and know what they need to do in order to develop their skills and knowledge further. Joint observations between university tutors and school-based trainers are carried out regularly in most subjects and help to establish consistency in the assessment of trainees. The marking of assignments is thorough.

Management and quality assurance

8. Selection procedures meet the Requirements and work well. The course regularly recruits well qualified, enthusiastic, and confident trainees. Although most have very good honours degrees in their subject, the provider also selects several with different sorts of degree because they demonstrate other valuable qualities. The proportion of minority ethnic trainees, though still modest, has risen since the last inspection, to some extent because of personal recommendation by previous trainees who had benefited from a high level of support. The completion and pass rates are mostly good, although the number of withdrawals last year was unusually high. Most trainees secure suitable teaching posts, often in partnership schools. Trainees are well prepared for the course because tutors set relevant pre-course tasks and conditions, closely related to individual needs identified at interview. For example, modern languages trainees whose second teaching language is weak are expected to attend an enhancement course.

9. Although a recent policy has established a consistent approach to selection across the subjects, there are some small but important variations in the way it is implemented; particularly in the way pre-course conditions are set.
10. The secondary programme is managed well. A particular strength is the partnership with schools. Many are long established partners and very loyal to the course. They make a significant contribution to the management and delivery of the training. School staff are involved in the selection of trainees. Several schools are used as a venue for central training, offering considerable expertise and excellent facilities. Communications are highly effective. Any issues raised with the university team are dealt with swiftly and effectively.
11. Managers are open to innovation. Distinctive schemes based on partnership training schools give trainees exceptional opportunities to work with excellent resources and to gain a rich variety of experiences. In one, for example, trainees have both their placements in the same town, and enjoy additional training events involving the various types of schools in the scheme. Different subject tutors have introduced innovations in their own training; for example, physical education trainees are enthusiastic about the use of a two-way radio during observation of their teaching. The deployment of skilled school-based trainers to lead and support clusters of mentors is an original approach, designed to tackle a problem caused by a staff vacancy in geography.
12. Subject leadership is good. University tutors have a high level of expertise. They regularly hold well attended subject panel meetings which provide good opportunities for staff to develop their skills and to contribute to the development of the course. School-based trainers are also well supported by clear documentation. As a result, they have a good understanding of their responsibilities and are well equipped to carry them out.
13. Arrangements for staff development, on the whole, are good. Newly appointed university tutors are well supported with an individual induction programme, which reflects their needs and experience. New school-based trainers are confident about their role because of the university's popular training course and the ongoing support they receive from tutors and other experts such as advanced skills teachers. University tutors have good access to professional development, including sessions when they share good practice. However, these are not sufficiently focused on the course's needs. For example, several tutors have not yet developed the skills to exploit the university's virtual learning environment, although this has been a course priority for some time.
14. The university's administrative arrangements at the start of the year were poor and resulted in a faltering start for many trainees. Several did not receive essential documentation for their primary school experience in good time. Problems with the registration of trainees resulted in frustrating delays in getting access to the library and to the university's computer systems.

15. The monitoring of school-based training is good. University tutors visit schools and meet with trainees regularly. Consequently, they know their departments well and so can make carefully considered placements for trainees. They know when a department should not be used and when additional support might be needed. The school tutors, too, understand their role in assuring the quality of school-based training and routinely meet with trainees, check their files and carry out joint observations with mentors.

16. Assessment procedures are rigorously moderated. Great care is taken to ensure consistency in the marking of assignments. External examiners are used well to check the security of the pass/fail borderline. Planned opportunities for the moderation of assessment within and across subjects are comprehensive and effective. Well written descriptors reflecting achievement of each of the Standards at different levels of competence are used well to help standardise judgements about trainees' teaching.

17. All involved in running the course are committed to further improvement. There have been clear improvements since the previous inspection in, for example, subject knowledge audits. The provider has made considerable efforts to strengthen the process for evaluating the course and planning for its improvement. However, this area still has shortcomings. Although managers and subject leaders collect extensive information about the course from all partners, they do not use it to the full to produce a clear picture of the course's strengths and weaknesses. Their evaluation reports on the course and on individual subjects are too variable in quality and content. While some are thorough and honest about areas for development, others contain little information and do not refer to any evidence that might indicate a weakness. Few mention the views of schools and none exploit the potential of the assessments of trainees' teaching.

18. Because of this, the course's improvement plans are not wholly effective. The tutors' choice of priorities for their subject plans, drawn from the course plan, is too subjective, and this leads to considerable differences between them for which there is no apparent rationale. The link between the planned developments and the evaluation reports is not always evident. While the mathematics plan has a clear and relevant focus on the intended impact of its actions on the trainees, this good feature is rare. Despite the managers' considerable efforts in evaluating the course and planning for improvement, school staff receive little feedback on their own or the course's performance.