

# Bath Spa University

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Newton Park  
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A primary initial teacher training  
inspection report.

2007/08

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## Introduction

Bath Spa University works in partnership with around 350 schools to provide primary and early years initial teacher training courses. It offers primary and early years PGCE full-time for 5-11 and 3-7 trainees and part-time for 3-7 trainees. At the time of the inspection there were 239 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 revised report combines evidence from a short inspection of the provision and of the management and quality assurance arrangements in 2006/07, with the judgements from the scrutiny of further evidence submitted to Ofsted in February 2008.

Grades are awarded in accordance with the following scale

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

## Main inspection judgements

Quality of training: Grade 1

Management and quality assurance: Grade 1

## Key strengths

- the systematic monitoring of quality which results in very good knowledge of the partnership's strengths and areas for development
- the high quality mentor training, as a result of which schools are very good training environments
- the excellent programme structure which ensures that all elements inter-relate and allows trainees to relate theory to practice very well
- the outstanding attention given to meeting trainees' individual needs through developing their subject knowledge and their teaching skills
- the high quality central and school-based training which draws upon effective primary practice and reflects an excellent understanding of how children learn
- excellent communications so that all partners have a first-class understanding of their roles and responsibilities
- the very strong partnership with schools, reflected in the involvement of school-based staff in the selection, training and assessment of trainees and in mentor training, course planning and evaluation.

## Point for consideration

- linking improvement plans to developing the quality of trainees' teaching.

## The quality of training

1. The quality of training has improved since the last inspection and is now outstanding. Major strengths in the provision contribute to a very high quality training programme that fully meets the Requirements.
2. All elements of the programme are very well structured to enable the trainees to meet the Standards at a good level or better. There is excellent coverage of the National Curriculum, the Primary National Strategy and the Curriculum Guidance for the Foundation Stage. This prepares trainees very well to teach across two key stages and to have a good understanding of the key stages before and after those for which they are training to teach. The balance of training between university and school is very good, and an excellent range of tasks and assignments helps trainees to link theory and practice very well. A particular strength is the way that all elements of the programme interlink and make sense to the trainees. For example, they understand how information and communication technology can be used to promote learning in other subjects. Generic themes, such as provision for pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities, are covered coherently in subject modules as well as in professional studies. Particularly strong features of the course content are the professional studies modules, which form an important core, the focus on assessment for pupils' learning, and the profile given to the early years.
3. Both central and school-based training is of high quality. Tutors are well qualified and have considerable experience in primary practice. University provision is enhanced by first-rate contributions from school-based staff in many subject and professional studies modules. Trainees benefit from excellent role models who demonstrate effective classroom practice. As a result, they are inspired to teach well and show an obvious sense of enjoyment in their learning. They have a very good understanding of how children's learning can be cross-curricular through, for example, the use of texts in literacy to promote pupils' learning in science or their knowledge and understanding of the world. The university's web-based learning environment is used especially well by trainees to deepen their understanding in subjects or to access resources for teaching.
4. Partnership staff are particularly skilled at meeting trainees' individual needs, knowing them very thoroughly. Consequently, trainees are helped to make good progress. Not only is their subject knowledge developed very well through, for example, differentiated sessions in mathematics, but also they are able to develop and follow special interests. For instance, trainees who are interested in special education are given a dual first block placement so that part of their time is spent in both mainstream and special schools. Trainees with learning difficulties or disabilities are provided with very good support to enable them to access all elements of the programme; for instance, large print materials for visually impaired trainees or assignment support for trainees with dyslexia. In addition, trainees with particular skills are used very effectively to provide peer support, for example in developing trainees' English subject knowledge.

5. School-based support for meeting individual needs is equally strong. The partnership ensures that placements take account of trainees' particular requirements and the schools' database is used very well to match trainees to schools. The quality of the support from mentors is excellent; they take great care in identifying emerging strengths and weaknesses through weekly tutorials and lesson observations. Trainees receive feedback on their teaching that is subject-related and they agree targets with mentors that match their needs very closely.

6. Trainees' progress towards the Standards is assessed consistently well. Their tasks and assignments are marked to a high standard and they are given feedback that is related to the content of the task and linked to the Standards and which gives clear guidance on how to improve further. The professional development profile is used very effectively to demonstrate how trainees are meeting each of the Standards.

7. As a consequence of these strengths, the partnership is successful in its aspiration of producing 'competent, creative and reflective teachers'.

## Management and quality assurance

8. The partnership is extremely well led and managed; this results in a training programme that is of very high quality and one that is continually improving. There are several factors that have contributed to this very positive picture.

9. The partnership is very successful in recruiting trainees who are of a high calibre, make good progress and meet the Standards at a good or very good level. This is because the selection process, which is conducted jointly by university tutors and school-based staff, is rigorous and explores very thoroughly candidates' potential to teach. For instance, candidates for the 3-7 course are tested on their understanding of how young children might learn through play. Identity and criminal records bureau checks are carried out very well and followed up assiduously if there are any administrative delays. The university is very active in seeking applicants from under-represented groups, such as males or those from minority ethnic groups, and is achieving some success although it has aspirations for still higher numbers.

10. A very strong feature of the management of the partnership is the active involvement of schools. All elements of the course involve the participation of school-based staff; as a result the provision for trainees is up-to-date and constantly revised in response to requests from schools. For instance, school representation on the primary steering panel enables this group to bring about changes to school experience handbooks, school based tasks or mentor training in the light of feedback from schools. The links between schools and university professional tutors are particularly effective and provide schools and trainees with high quality support, good guidance and accurate moderation of the assessment of trainees' teaching.

Tutors provide continuity of support because they work regionally with small groups of trainees in central professional studies training and in their school placements.

11. Very well trained school-based mentors and school professional tutors make a major contribution to the high quality of support that trainees receive in schools. The partnership provides excellent training for school staff before each school experience, delivered jointly by tutors and school-based mentors in each of the four regions. All mentors have received recent training. The written and web-based materials, such as the programme and school experience handbooks, are of extremely high quality and support face-to-face training very well. Communication within the partnership is excellent and enables the partnership office to keep up-to-date data relating to each school. As a result, school-based training is very effective and helps trainees to develop their skills and knowledge systematically in placements that meet their needs very effectively.

12. The partnership has excellent knowledge of its strengths and areas for development. This is because it has varied strategies for monitoring provision and making judgements about quality. At the heart of these are the trainees' views, which are sought during and after each taught module and at the end of every school experience. This feedback, complemented by that from tutors, mentors, external examiners and elsewhere, enables the partnership to identify very quickly where provision is strong and where improvements can be made. For instance, the visits to special schools have been better timed; and trainees join the mentor training to enable initial contact to be made earlier.

13. The outcome of the above monitoring is that the partnership is very well placed to bring about improvements, which it is doing very successfully. Recently introduced improvements in mentors' assessments of trainees are enabling tutors to gain a clear view of how well aspects of English, mathematics and science are taught. This is making a major contribution to the partnership's capacity to evaluate its work. However, still more could be done to link improvement planning to developing the quality of trainees' teaching. Nevertheless, the provider is a very effective learning organisation, committed to achieving excellence in all that it does.