

University of Hertfordshire

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A primary initial teacher training
short inspection report
2006/07

Managing inspector
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Introduction

The University of Hertfordshire works in partnership with 408 schools to provide primary initial teacher training (ITT) courses. It offers a three year Bachelor of Education (BEd) course and PGCE courses specialising in early years and general primary teaching. At the time of the inspection there were 569 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 content and structure of the training programmes, particularly the emphasis on processes of learning
- the strong coherence within the university-based training, especially the effective and imaginative integration of information and communications technology (ICT)
- the quality and accessibility of the distance learning resources provided for the flexible route
- the emphasis given to equality of opportunity and the successful recruitment of trainees from under-represented groups
- the strong support that the university provides for partnership schools and the close working relationship that results

Points for action

- making training in schools more subject specific

Points for consideration

- taking greater account of trainees' individual needs and expertise in planning training
- making improvement planning more specifically related to the quality of trainees' teaching skills and the standards they reach
- making best use of the teaching space in the university to model good primary practice

The quality of training

1. The structure and content of the training programmes are strengths. All courses fully meet the Requirements and provide good coverage of the National Curriculum and the Curriculum Guidance for the Foundation Stage. Appropriate attention is paid to the literacy and numeracy frameworks and Primary National Strategy materials. In all courses there is an imaginative use of key themes, for example enquiry or communication, which act as organising principles and underpin the delivery of subject content. Subject courses are well structured to be cumulative and progressive, and good links are made across modules.
2. The elements from different courses combine very well to produce a coherent and effective training programme. General professional studies (GPS) provide a central spine to the programme. For example, on the PGCE course, sessions lead into a 'reflective learning seminar' where trainees reflect on issues arising from their training. The shared delivery of lectures, workshops and seminars, by different staff, has a positive impact upon the cohesion of the courses. A particular strength is the way that training in ICT permeates all programmes, for example in the emphasis on multi-media texts in English. An ICT assignment is linked to work in a foundation subject and enhances understanding of the cohesiveness of the primary curriculum. It is well regarded by trainees for its usefulness.
3. University-based training is very good. Tutors are passionate and knowledgeable about their subjects and seek to enthuse trainees similarly. They provide good role-models, demonstrating different teaching strategies which can be used in school. Materials are up to date and relevant. Good use is made of alternative approaches to training. For example, first year trainees are encouraged to access learning groups on the university intranet. Training in ICT is particularly strong, as in a recent cross-curricular project on Africa, designed to develop creativity as part of a focus on *Excellence in Enjoyment*. Digital photography was used to record events and create a reflective log.
4. In schools, insufficient use is made of mentors' expertise to support subject-specific development. Although mentors are well briefed about their role and work hard to challenge trainees and aid their learning, there is no programme of school-based subject-specific training. Consequently, development opportunities are missed; for example, trainees complete subject tasks whilst on placements but mentors are not given any direction how they might use the activity to reinforce trainees' subject learning. An exception is the interesting approach to developing mentors' subject expertise in ICT. Schools are given access to the same ICT audit and interactive training materials as trainees. In this way, mentors are enabled to address any lack of confidence and support trainees' subject knowledge development more effectively.
5. Trainees have access to a suitable range of resources including outstanding access to information, session notes and materials and to required reading on the intranet. The distance learning resources, developed to support independent learning for the flexible PGCE route, are particularly strong. However, the dedicated

training rooms for some subjects are not always organised well enough to model good primary practice. In English, where there are no dedicated rooms, it is much harder to model how to create appropriate conditions for learning, for example through display or creating an area for role play. The library is well resourced with academic titles and materials to support school-based work and is accessible at all times.

6. The university places considerable emphasis on subject knowledge auditing at the beginning and end of the programmes. Although there are recommended readings, trainees are expected to develop their own plans to address subject weaknesses. In mathematics, additional materials are provided to extend those electronically generated. Where necessary, trainers will provide additional help for individuals in all subjects. The university also audits trainees' prior school experience. However, insufficient use is made of this information to differentiate training in any way.

7. Trainees' progress against the Standards is closely monitored through on-going assessment of assignments, contributions to seminars and workshops and practical teaching. Regular reviews of progress take place at significant points and trainees are well aware of their progress. Marking of academic work identifies priorities for subject development, as well as any weaknesses in the trainees' use of English. Monitoring of progress in teaching, although strong in general terms, is variable in relation to subject knowledge and its related pedagogy. It is often dependent on the mentors' confidence in the subject. The next steps in improving a trainee's subject teaching are not always clearly defined.

8. The assessment of trainees' achievements against the Standards is secure. Marking of assignments is accurate and closely linked to the Standards. Assessment of teaching is robust, but is sometimes insufficiently specific in subject terms.

Management and quality assurance

9. Recruitment and selection are effective. The web site and course prospectuses provide clear information for prospective candidates. The courses are popular; applications for places have doubled in the current year and well-qualified applicants are recruited. The university has significantly improved its recruitment of men and trainees from minority ethnic groups. Candidates are given a good overview of the course before being interviewed. The rigorous interview process successfully involves partnership schools in the selection of candidates. However, outcomes of interview tasks are not used sufficiently well to tailor pre-course preparation to meet the needs of individual trainees. The university has a systematic approach to ensure that the necessary child protection checks are carried out.

10. The courses are very well led and managed. There are good opportunities for schools, trainees and tutors to contribute to development of the courses through the programme committees and the professional advisory group. Well presented information is easily accessed by tutors, schools and trainees from the

comprehensive partnership web site. The detailed policies for equality of opportunity, race equality, disability equality and harassment and bullying are all rigorously monitored, and appropriate actions are taken when required.

11. There is a very effective working relationship between the university and the partnership schools. The support for its partnership schools provided by the university is a key strength of the courses. The responsibilities of tutors, mentors and trainees are clearly detailed in the partnership agreement. There are robust systems in place to ensure that the requirements of the agreement are met and that all trainees receive the experiences and support they are entitled to in school. For example, the mentor summary sheets designed for each school placement are used very effectively by mentors and trainees.

12. The professional development of mentors is a high priority and the university goes to great lengths to ensure that all training is up to date. The majority of mentors attend training sessions before each school placement. When a mentor has been unable to attend a training session, this is followed up systematically by the university. A rigorous system is effective in monitoring the performance of mentors on each school placement by the professional mentor and link tutor. Mentors are actively encouraged to develop their skills further and several mentors have benefited from the opportunity to train at master's level at the university. New link tutors undergo a thorough programme of induction through training and a buddy system.

13. The programme of link tutor visits to schools during placements is well structured. These visits are used very effectively to ensure that all trainees receive their full entitlement of support in school and that this is of consistently good quality. The joint lesson observations, carried out by mentors and link tutors on each school placement, are effective in moderating judgements on the quality of teaching and provide valuable training for mentors. The written feedback from lesson observations is evaluative and developmental, making appropriate reference to the focus of the observation. However, too few observations provide sufficiently detailed feedback to trainees about subject-specific issues. As a result, it is difficult for the university to evaluate the impact of its training in individual subjects.

14. The team of well qualified tutors work very effectively together to plan and deliver the courses. The inclusion of two seconded primary teachers to this team is a good initiative which helps to ensure that the university-based training reflects current primary practice.

15. There are robust systems in place to ensure that assignments are marked accurately. Moderation arrangements are very good with an appropriate proportion of assignments being double-marked. As a result, assignments are well marked, particularly so in English and science.

16. The university has implemented rigorous systems for monitoring and evaluating all aspects of its training. Evidence is gathered from a wide range of sources including trainees, schools, tutors and external examiner reports. It is analysed

thoroughly and responded to well. When possible, improvements are implemented quickly. For example, 'mentor milestones' have been prepared to assist mentors in their work and an additional session on planning has been included on the PGCE course to help meet trainees' needs. If concerns are raised about the performance of a tutor or mentor, these are investigated and acted upon appropriately. Longer term developments are included in the annual monitoring and evaluation report. This report incorporates a frank analysis of monitoring data. However, the planned actions and success criteria are not sufficiently linked to the quality of trainees' teaching skills and the standards they reach.