

University of Sunderland

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A secondary initial teacher training
short inspection report
2006/07

Managing Inspector
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Introduction

The University of Sunderland works in partnership with 232 schools and colleges to provide secondary initial teacher training courses. It offers a range of one-year and two-year PGCE courses and two-year, three-year and four-year undergraduate courses in English, design and technology, geography, mathematics, science, and information and communication technology (ICT) for the 11-18 age range; and in business education and engineering for the 14-19 age range. 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: 1

The overall quality of training is at least good.

The provider will receive a short inspection in three years.

Key strengths

- the course's high level of coherence and consistency, achieved through the close collaboration of all partners
- the strong emphasis on the practicalities of teaching
- the attention paid to trainees' individual needs and the excellent support trainees receive
- the very high quality of support for trainers, which contributes to the effectiveness of the school-based training
- the commitment of all partners to the course, reflected in the valuable contribution schools make to the training
- the extensive range of information used to evaluate the course, including evidence of its outcomes, which leads to an accurate identification of future priorities
- the strong commitment to continuous improvement
- the highly effective and constantly improving recruitment procedures.

Points for consideration

- writing clear action plans with success criteria that focus on the quality of training and trainees' achievement of the Standards.

The quality of training

1. A major strength of the course is its coherence. The whole course is driven by a well conceived sequence of themes, introduced in the university professional studies, developed through subject sessions, contextualised through school-based training and tasks, and leading progressively towards the module assignments. This clearly defined structure supports consistency in content and quality across the settings where training takes place and across the different subjects.
2. The course structure prepares trainees very well for their teaching experience by, for instance, providing serial periods before each block practice. Those taking the longer routes to qualified teacher status also find the experiences they have in the earlier years of training mesh very well with the challenges of the professional year. The content of the course is relevant and up to date. For example, it takes account of recent developments such as personalised learning, global education and the *Every Child Matters* agenda.
3. The training is highly effective. A particular strength is its deliberate emphasis on the practicalities of teaching. Tutors model a good variety of teaching approaches in their subject sessions, and trainees have ample opportunities to observe good classroom practice in schools. The university offers well equipped, modern training facilities reflecting the best found in schools. Trainees are introduced to assessment from an early stage. Consequently, they quickly grasp basic principles such as the need to link lesson planning to assessment, to apply success criteria and to employ a range of questioning and observation techniques. Training takes very good account of how to manage classrooms and pupils with challenging behaviour. For example, many trainees were moved by a presentation by one partnership head teacher on teaching vulnerable pupils in challenging circumstances, and had been inspired to rethink their approaches to difficult behaviour by planning better for pupils' individual needs. The impact of training is regularly intensified by the use of the everyday experiences of teachers from partnership schools.
4. School-based training is effective because the partnership's expectations are communicated clearly and schools meet them willingly and well. School-based trainers assiduously draw upon the week-by-week module framework when designing their training. School-based generic training is relevant and substantial. Staff go well beyond the agreed entitlement to offer a high level of support. Often, several members of a department have trained as mentors and contribute to training, supporting and assessing the trainees. New and established school-based trainers are reflective about their practice, keen to share approaches and eager to make their contribution more effective.
5. Weaknesses in the school-based training, such as the support for trainees who find self evaluation difficult, and a tendency for targets to focus more on class management than on subject pedagogy, have been identified by tutors, who are

taking appropriate action. The difficulty in tracking trainees' progress against their targets is being tackled with the introduction of a well designed booklet.

6. The provision for individual needs is a distinctive strength. The provider's variety of different routes enables a wider range of trainees to be trained than the one-year PGCE alone would allow. Thorough subject knowledge auditing begins at selection and action planning rapidly follows. The weekly subject sessions give tutors flexibility to complement or broaden subject development and to meet emerging needs, sometimes in original and interesting ways. For instance, some use peer training that draws on individual trainees' prior experience.

7. Tutors take great care to ensure a good match of schools to trainees' needs. The placements of one trainee in wheelchair-accessible schools typify the consideration given to these decisions. Over the two placements, trainees gain experience of teaching their specialisms and get opportunities to bolster their weaker areas. Information in reports from the first teaching placement is picked up well by the second school; one trainee, for instance, who needed experience of working with high attainers, was quickly involved in an after-school club for more able pupils. The virtual learning environment provides an opportunity for trainees to get peer help with their individual problems, such as how to use apostrophes. Given the significant differences in the starting points of the trainees in the professional year, this attention to their individual needs enables them to make very good progress and explains the very high ratings the provider gets in the annual survey of newly qualified teachers.

Management and quality assurance

8. The provider's energetic and imaginative approach to recruitment is responsible for its success in regularly selecting a good crop of trainees. By keeping its procedures under review and subject to well considered refinements it has continued to recruit trainees from a wide variety of backgrounds, including a good number from minority ethnic groups. The pass rate is high and the great majority secure teaching posts, often in partnership schools. Although its detailed analysis of data has not indicated any significant concerns, the provider has worked hard to reduce the number of trainees withdrawing from the course to what is now a very low figure. It has also identified a need to increase the number of undergraduate trainees who achieve qualified teacher status and so has introduced more rigour into its entry requirements. A particular strength of the process is the early identification of trainees' subject knowledge needs and the thorough way successful candidates are prepared for the course before it starts.

9. The high degree of coherence and consistency in the course is achieved through the close collaboration of the university tutors, who plan together the common core and use this as the basis for the training in each subject. They meet regularly to share ideas and agree approaches to training. New ideas are encouraged, trialled and, if suitable, adopted across the programme. For example,

arrangements to support trainees who find academic writing difficult were an extension of good practice used in two subject areas. The new weekly target sheet is a further example of the extension of a successful pilot.

10. Schools are firmly committed to the partnership and provide a varied range of opportunities for trainees. Many, for example, boast well resourced and strong departments and effective approaches to behaviour management in challenging circumstances. Their staff contribute to the centre-based training, and trainees respond well to these highly practical sessions. School-based trainers in the great majority of schools understand what is expected and ensure that trainees get their entitlement and usually a great deal more.

11. The training and support for the trainers themselves are outstanding. Partnership development meetings are usually well attended and provide a valuable opportunity for mentors to refresh their skills, share ideas, and be briefed about new developments. Generic mentors are well supported by their school liaison tutor, who makes frequent visits, often has a useful long-standing relationship with the school, and readily provides advice and guidance to staff and trainees. Documentation is excellent; it ensures that mentors understand very clearly what is expected of them and contributes significantly to the coherence and consistency of the training. Its availability on the virtual learning environment is greatly appreciated and exploited regularly by school staff. Communications are excellent; university tutors and the placement office are very quick to respond to schools' concerns and queries.

12. The induction arrangements for new university tutors are comprehensive and effective. These include mentoring, shadowing, and being accompanied and observed when carrying out their responsibilities. Several new staff usefully have prior experience of the course.

13. Arrangements for monitoring school-based training and assessment are thorough and contribute significantly to the high quality of the course. Subject tutors carry out joint observations with mentors on every visit. Some experienced generic mentors have very effective means for monitoring the work of their subject mentors, including joint observations and scrutiny of trainees' files. Consequently, the university staff know their schools very well and this enables them to make well judged decisions when placing trainees. This intelligence tends not to be recorded but there are plans to establish a database on schools in the future.

14. The course is comprehensively evaluated. The process draws on an extensive range of information provided by all partners and leads to a clear and relevant agenda for improvement. The opinions of school staff, for example, are gathered most commonly through the four annual meetings but also by means of a questionnaire, although the response rate for the latter is low. New initiatives are only introduced after a considered evaluation of the success of a pilot; for example, tutors', trainees' and mentors' views on the effectiveness of paired placements are being collected before managers decide on how to proceed with the project. External examiners provide tutors with a valued perspective on aspects of the course; following the previous inspection, the university has worked hard with its

examiners to improve the quality of their written judgements. A wide range of statistical data is carefully analysed and used to identify priorities. For example, the survey of newly qualified teachers stimulated improvements in the training in assessment.

15. Additionally, managers undertake a study of the outcomes of the course, for example by analysing a sample of trainees' career entry and development profiles, in order to identify ways in which the course might be improved. This scrutiny pinpointed a need for more emphasis on fieldwork in geography, for instance, and for improving trainees' skills in evaluating their lessons. A study of trainees' files also prompted the development of the new target setting booklet.

16. The provider is strongly committed to continuous improvement. A powerful example of this was the decision to close the music course because of concerns about its quality. University staff are quick to respond to schools' and trainees' suggestions. This readiness to respond to partners' views has led to various adjustments to the course, such as the timing of one of the modules. However, although relevant issues, such as weaknesses in school-based training, are accurately identified and tackled in ways that involve all partners, documented action plans lack coherence and few express clear success criteria in terms of better quality training or how trainees' teaching will improve. This makes it difficult to be sure all partners know the current priorities and understand their own role in the plan.