

University of Nottingham

School of Education
Jubilee Campus
Nottingham
NG8 1BB

A secondary initial teacher training
inspection report
2007/08

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Introduction

The University of Nottingham works in partnership with 118 schools to provide secondary initial teacher training (ITT) courses. It offers training in English, science, maths, history, geography and modern languages. In addition to a one-year PGCE course, the provider offers training through a flexible PGCE and a Graduate Teacher Programme. At the time of the inspection there were 281 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 the judgements 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 outstanding course structure and content, continually evolving to reflect current developments in education and the most up-to-date outcomes of educational research
- the very strong coherence of the programme, characterised by well planned links between all elements of university and school-based training
- the rigorous and thorough systems for monitoring and evaluating the quality of the provision
- the emphasis on the development of trainees' skills in critical thinking and action research
- excellent quality documentation, which effectively informs and supports all those involved in the training programme.

The quality of training

1. The quality of the training is outstanding. The content and structure are exceptionally well planned, and are constantly revised in response to the most recent developments in education, including the outcomes of cutting-edge research. Revisiting of various topics throughout the course is a strong feature, resulting in trainees developing a very thorough understanding of a range of important issues. The content, both generic and within subject areas, is underpinned by a clear philosophy of encouraging trainees to become highly competent reflective and researching practitioners.
2. The content of the English, history and geography courses extends beyond the basic requirements for teaching National Curriculum and examination courses, encouraging trainees to consider complex issues specific to their subject. Trainees in modern languages, for example, consider the teaching of languages through the medium of other subjects. All subject courses include a strong emphasis on developing trainees' critical thinking skills alongside subject knowledge.
3. The coherence between all elements of the training is an outstanding feature. For example, meticulous attention has been paid to the timing of particular generic studies sessions so that trainees can effectively build upon the theoretical knowledge of a topic through exploration of its practical application in schools. Links between subject and generic training are also very strong. To complement the core training, the university offers a series of optional twilight sessions on issues such as stress management, time management and voice control, often led by specialists from external agencies. These sessions enrich the overall training programme.
4. Trainees' experience in primary schools is supported by particularly high quality guidance, which helps them to gain the most from their placement. As a result, they engage in highly relevant reflective work; for example, by considering the ways in which the current trend towards a theme-based primary curriculum might impact upon discrete subject work in secondary schools.
5. A range of written assignments is extremely effective in supporting the training programme; topics demand that trainees research their work carefully and make clear links between theoretical work and classroom practice. During the final placement, trainees, as a group, carry out a school-based enquiry. Themes are relevant and beneficial to placement schools and trainees; for example, one project considered how the views of pupils could be used to inform developments in classroom practice.
6. All trainers have very high expectations of trainees, and the trainees themselves are fully aware of this. The principle of high quality research informing and supporting first-rate classroom practice is evident throughout the programme, particularly in the way that university tutors lead their training sessions. These include stimulating activities with a strong emphasis on pupils' learning. Trainees are encouraged to explore a wide range of teaching and learning strategies; for

example, how to capitalise on pupils' unplanned interruptions during a lesson. Other innovative work includes the use of 'pupil mentors' to provide constructive feedback to trainees on their teaching. Subject departments in partner schools provide very good contexts for training. It is common for all members of a subject department to be involved in the training, and trainees have a strong sense of working as part of a team.

7. Excellent quality documentation is used very effectively to support the training. In particular, the school experience log encourages trainees to reflect constantly on how their 'personal philosophy of the teaching and learning of the subject is developing and changing'. A wide range of high quality resources is available to trainees; for instance, science trainees benefit from the resources provided by the on-site science learning centre.

8. The identification of trainees' individual needs begins at the selection stage. This is followed by scrupulous attention to the analysis of their ongoing needs and development. This process is supported by excellent systems for auditing and reviewing subject knowledge, and a series of high quality tutorial sessions. Tailored tasks are set throughout the course, and discussed by trainers and trainees in much detail.

9. Written feedback on lesson observations is detailed and constructive. Although the forms used by mentors differ across subjects, their content has recently been reviewed to ensure that the university's expectations of how the different forms should be completed are clear to all mentors. The university is currently reviewing the impact of these changes. Overall, mentors provide precise and helpful feedback on strengths and areas for development, leading to challenging yet achievable targets.

10. The systems for assessing trainees' progress towards the Standards are very thorough and rigorous. Collection of evidence is well organised, and interim reports completed by school-based trainers are very good. Trainees are provided with excellent feedback on their assignments. The many significant strengths of the training programme result in trainees' rapid development into committed professionals; several made the point that they were 'amazed at the progress made in a relatively short space of time.' External Examiners noted that 'the course offers a high level of preparation for (trainees) to enter the teaching profession'

Management and quality assurance

11. High quality publicity materials provide comprehensive information on all courses and ensure that applicants are fully aware of the demands of the programme. Trainees speak very enthusiastically about the university's open days, which encourage candidates from a wide range of backgrounds to apply for the courses on offer. Extremely thorough selection procedures result in the recruitment

of high quality trainees. Interviews are thoroughly documented, including reasons for acceptance or rejection, and these are subsequently analysed.

12. The selection process involves some very challenging and thought-provoking tasks, which provide the interviewers with very useful information on candidates' suitability for teaching. Great care is taken in placing trainees on the best route to match their needs and experience. Successful candidates are provided with high quality pre-course tasks, followed up by trainers at the start of the programme. The provider has consistently met its targets for the recruitment of trainees from minority ethnic backgrounds.

13. The partnership with schools is strong and well established. Schools show a high level of loyalty to the university and feel that they are fully involved in course development. The involvement of several European schools means that a number of trainees benefit greatly from international placements. The committee structure has been revised this year to enable course leaders to work together in gaining an overview of all routes offered; this has been successful in facilitating programme development across the provision. The partnership committee, which includes representatives from schools, meets regularly and provides valuable input to discussions on the programme development. All contributions are valued in this highly effective collaborative practice.

14. The roles and responsibilities of all those involved in the training are clearly documented and understood. Good quality training sessions at the university ensure that school-based trainers are kept up-to-date with all developments, and have the skills and knowledge necessary to carry out their roles. Recent changes have resulted in subject-specialist tutors taking on the role of generic tutors during the first placement, and subject mentors taking on a greater responsibility for trainees' subject knowledge development. All involved have responded well to these changes, and evidence suggests that the impact on the training programme has been positive.

15. Systems for monitoring and evaluating the quality of provision are outstanding. The provider recognises the importance of such systems as the training programme is constantly evolving to reflect current developments. Any modifications to the programme are kept under regular and close scrutiny, and outcomes are analysed in great detail. Working groups, which include teachers from partner schools, make an excellent contribution to programme development and are also involved in monitoring and evaluation. Evaluative information from a range of external and internal sources is very carefully analysed, resulting in good quality data that is used effectively to inform programme management and development.

16. The very strong nature of the partnership facilitates effective quality assurance procedures. As a result of tutor visits, collaborative work and the gathering of evaluative material, the provider has an accurate understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the partnership. Coordinating mentors are effective in maintaining an overview of the quality of school-based training, and some provide excellent support for staff, particularly new mentors. School-based trainers are provided with

information from trainees' evaluations, and this enables them to improve and develop aspects of their work. These overwhelmingly positive evaluations encourage school-based trainers to feel confident and committed to their work.

17. Great attention is paid to the monitoring of assessment procedures, and the systems for internal and external moderation of judgements are robust. High quality input from external examiners is used well by tutors, both in ensuring that the assessment of trainees is accurate and rigorous, and in planning future developments.

18. The first-rate systems for monitoring and evaluation are reflected in excellent quality action planning. Whole course plans effectively identify priorities, with details of action required and very clear success criteria. Action planning at subject level is also excellent; the provider has been successful in addressing this issue, which was identified as a possible area for development at the last inspection.