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## A further education teacher training inspection report 2006/07

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## The inspection

1. The inspection was carried out in accordance with the Framework for the inspection of initial training of further education (FE) teachers and the guidance in the Handbook for the inspection of initial training of further education teachers, both published in 2004. It was conducted in two phases by Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) and additional inspectors. During the first phase which took place in February 2007, inspectors focused on the quality of training and management and quality assurance procedures. In the second phase, inspectors evaluated the achievements of FE trainees through observing their teaching and gathering evidence of their progress during the course. Phase 2 of the inspection was completed in June 2007.

## Background

2. The university's department of post-compulsory education and training collaborates with 20 network centres providing initial teacher education for some 1,400 trainees across the network colleges. In addition the university provides training for 145 trainees on full-time generic pre-service courses and 48 subject specialists in ESOL and Literacy, 119 trainees on part-time in-service courses and 458 trainees on the flexible learning course. The professional graduate certificate of education (PGCE) and the certificate in education (Cert Ed) are within the university's academic framework and satisfy the Secretary of State's requirements for FE teacher education. In order to achieve the PGCE/Cert Ed, trainees must successfully complete all six modules of the qualification. In addition there are six formal assessments of practical teaching, of which four must be passed (two at level 1 and two at level 2).

3. Full-time pre-service trainees are located on the Greenwich campus and are linked with an appropriate institution funded by the Learning and Skills Council, such as an FE, sixth form college, prison or other training institution. During semester 1 they attend the university for 2 days a week and for 1 day a week in semester 2. In-service trainees, both at the university and network colleges, come from a very wide range of backgrounds across the learning and skills sector. Trainees following the flexible route are located around the country. They attend study days arranged by the university or network colleges and together with the pre- and in-service trainees, they are provided with independent learning materials. Tutors provide additional support via email, telephone and through visits to undertake teaching practice assessments.

## Effectiveness of provision

4. The overall quality of provision is adequate (grade 3). Trainees make satisfactory progress. They are appropriately qualified and demonstrate a good command of their specialist subjects. Trainees are skilful in translating their understanding of theoretical aspects of learning into the context of their teaching practice. Their awareness of inclusion and diversity is not so well-developed; this is evident in some weak planning to meet individual students' learning needs in lessons. Pre-service trainees demonstrate good classroom management skills, for example in the use of questioning to extend and reinforce learning. The extent to which trainees develop as very good teachers is determined more by the expertise of the teaching teams they work with than by the quality of mentoring, which is inconsistent. Most teacher trainers model good practice, although the quality of training varies, from very good to adequate, between different centres. Trainees benefit from good pastoral care and are able to mirror this good practice in the support they provide for their own students. Weaknesses identified during phase 1 of the inspection have been addressed rigorously. Action taken has already had a significant impact on the quality of trainees' experience but there remains more to be done to ensure greater consistency across the network.

## Key strengths

Inspectors identified the following strengths:

- highly motivated trainees who know their subjects well and provide a good quality of care to their students
- a flexible learning route that is effective in enabling trainees to access teacher training who would not otherwise be able to attend a taught course
- training that challenges trainees to critically evaluate how theories of learning apply to their specific teaching context
- good pastoral care and a highly supportive environment for trainees on taught courses
- very thorough moderation of trainees' coursework
- rigorous action leading to rapid improvements in training

## Areas for attention

The partnership should address:

- insufficient attention to the minimum core of language, literacy and numeracy in some network colleges
- weak aspects of mentoring
- uneven quality of tutoring on the flexible learning programme offered by the university
- underdeveloped use of data to inform management decisions and quality improvement
- the lack of a clear plan to engage all network providers in the further development and improvement of provision

Further information on strengths and areas for attention is contained in the substantial sections of the report that follow.

## Achievements of trainees

5. Trainees demonstrate a strong commitment to developing their students' employability and life skills alongside vocational or academic study. Trainees are suitably qualified and have a good command of their specialism. Typically, they are enthusiastic and dedicated with high expectations of their students.

6. Many trainees are recognised by their mentors for the good contributions they make to their workplace. For example, through curriculum development, taking part in special projects, taking on additional responsibilities to support their teams or leading extra curricular activities.

7. Trainees act readily on advice offered to help them to improve. The majority are confident in evaluating their teaching and can identify aspects that are effective and where further development is needed. However, their self-evaluations do not draw sufficiently on evidence of the progress made by their own students or the effectiveness of the learning that has taken place in their lessons.

8. The majority of trainees are able to articulate clear learning objectives, but they do not always plan how to assess their students' progress towards achieving them during the lesson. Not all trainees are sufficiently skilled in ensuring that the most able students are challenged and that all

students achieve their full potential. A minority of trainees lack confidence in planning to meet the particular needs of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and in making the best use of learning support assistants in their lessons.

9. Most trainees are confident in managing disruptive or challenging behaviour. They use a wide range of methods to engage students, including real life materials and games. However, some of them talk too much and their students do not develop independent learning skills as well as they could. Pre-service trainees are particularly effective in the use of questioning techniques to check on their students' learning.

10. Where trainees use information and communications technology (ICT), they use it well. Trainees at the university appreciate the ways in which their tutors provide opportunities for them to engage with technology during training sessions.

11. The extent to which trainees develop as inspirational teachers or take risks in their teaching is often most influenced by their workplace context. For example, where trainees work within high performing teams they are able to move beyond threshold standards of teaching and learning and demonstrate exemplary practice.

12. Trainees provide good levels of pastoral support for their students and respond sensitively to instances of low self-esteem. They use praise and encouragement appropriately to develop motivation and self-confidence. Many trainees have developed good links with central support services available within their organisations.

13. A minority of trainees do not have sufficient opportunity to contribute to the assessment and monitoring of their own students' progress. This is particularly the case for trainees who are not employed in colleges. In many instances, trainees' formative feedback to students on their work does not provide clear guidance on what they need to do to improve.

## Quality of training

14. Both the university and its network colleges offer a variety of modes of study, times and places for attendance, which provide effectively for a range of trainee and employer needs. In particular the flexible learning route is successful in enabling access to initial teacher education for a number of trainees who would not otherwise be able to attend a taught course. The network has established a portfolio of discrete provision tailored to employers' specific training needs, for example the Metropolitan Police, local authorities and young offender institutions.

15. Training is planned appropriately to meet national requirements. The content and layout of the courses encourages trainees to develop their teaching skills progressively. Schemes of work and session plans provide good coverage of content and plenty of opportunity for trainees to develop their skills in self-evaluation. Attention is given to developing trainees' subject pedagogy through a course module which requires them to research a selected issue of relevance to their subject specialism. In addition pre-service trainees are grouped into 'best-fit' subject groups, the most popular being Skills for Life specialisms. Visiting speakers are used well, both at the university and in colleges, to update trainees on current developments in post-compulsory education and training, for example the 14-19 curriculum and the Every Child Matters agenda. Handbooks and study guides provided by the university are comprehensive and prompt trainees to undertake further investigation.

16. Assignments are designed well to consolidate learning and enable trainees to draw on their own teaching experience. The assessment schedule is enhanced by 'key tasks' which trainees undertake in preparation for the final assessed coursework. Trainees use these tasks effectively to extend their knowledge and understanding of teaching theory and their own teaching practice.

17. For some pre-service trainees, placements have started too late and this has restricted their capacity to meet coursework deadlines. The university has addressed this by reviewing its recruitment procedures and appointing administrative staff to ensure the sufficiency and timeliness of placements. Applicants for the next intake have already received confirmation of a secure placement.

18. The quality of training in taught sessions ranges from adequate to very good. Where training is consistently good, trainers use their own teaching methods as a learning resource to model and illustrate best-practice. In most sessions teacher trainers encourage further individual reading, research and the use of ICT. Consequently trainees develop the confidence to critically evaluate theories of learning and apply them to their own working contexts. They work well collaboratively and are very supportive of one another.

19. Since phase 1 of the inspection the university has invested significantly in upgrading the quality of its accommodation for FE teacher training. University staff have improved their own skills in the use of technology to enhance and support learning. Trainees who are based there speak favourably of the extent to which their tutors use ICT to demonstrate good practice and provide them with hands-on experience during sessions.

20. The university has recently established a task group to review approaches to meeting the requirements of the minimum core of language, literacy and numeracy in their courses. This has resulted in significant improvement both at the university and some of the network colleges. For example, a revised lesson plan pro-forma has been particularly effective in raising trainees' awareness of the minimum core in the context of their own teaching. The extent to which trainees are assessed on the development of these skills, in teaching their specialist subject, remains variable across the network. A few trainees lack the knowledge and understanding to use the new lesson plan pro- forma adequately.

21. Pre-service trainees make good use of the university's 'on-line campus' (OLC) to support their own learning. Trainees referred to this resource as a 'lifesaver'. It offers access to significant amounts of good quality material which they apply to their coursework and their teaching practice. As a consequence pre-service trainees have a good insight to how they can use information and learning technology (ILT) as a teaching and learning tool. However, the OLC is not used to its full potential across the network. In-service trainees rarely engage with it and neither the course content nor the assignment activities prompt them to do so.

22. Pastoral care and guidance for trainees is good. Trainees benefit from supportive environments in which to explore and try out new skills. They are confident in the knowledge that they have someone to turn to if planned teaching strategies are less successful than they anticipate. Pastoral care for trainees based at the university is particularly strong. Trainees with specific learning support needs are well catered for. There is a robust framework of support for trainees' emotional well-being, particularly so for those following pre-service courses at the university.

23. However, arrangements for supporting trainees' individual needs in language, literacy and numeracy lack coherence across the network. The university is addressing this through a network policy to be in place from September 2007. With the exception of trainees on the flexible course managed by the university, most trainees undergo some form of initial assessment to identify their level of literacy. The extent to which their numeracy and ICT needs are diagnosed differs between centres. In a few cases the tools and techniques used for assessing and diagnosing literacy or numeracy needs are not fit for purpose. Where trainees do not meet the required levels in literacy and numeracy they are referred to additional support. There is no subsequent monitoring of the extent to which trainees access this support or its effectiveness. Support for the development of pre-service trainees' numeracy skills is not well developed. Where needs are identified trainees are referred to on-line materials, but very few make use of them.



24. Trainees on flexible learning courses are heavily reliant on their tutors to guide their progress. For the most part, the quality of support and guidance provided by tutors on these courses is particularly good. However, the quality of support provided by a small number of flexible course tutors is not good enough and this hinders trainees' progress.

25. The quality of mentoring for trainees in the workplace is highly variable. The university has been slow in developing a model of good practice, as a result some of the FE colleges have evolved different, and sometimes more successful, models of mentoring. At the start of the inspection only pre-service and first year in-service trainees had an identified mentor. By phase 2, second year trainees had mentors in place.

26. Very few mentors have attended training. Consequently, they are insufficiently aware of the course content, assessment criteria and minimum core requirements. Some mentors also line manage their trainee and so the boundary between performance management and developmental coaching is not defined clearly enough. Many mentors, in particular those not employed in FE colleges, do not have sufficient time to undertake the role successfully.

27. The university has taken a number of steps to improve the quality of mentoring, including drawing on the good practice developed in one network college. Further mentor training has taken place and more regional training has been planned. Guidance materials have been updated. These give clearer instructions for college and university staff to moderate and evaluate mentor contributions to assessment. Overall, trainees feel well-supported by their mentors and the university has raised its expectations of the subject-specific guidance they provide.

28. The university leads on rigorous moderation of trainees' coursework. This results in accurate and highly consistent assessment across the network. Despite this, not all tutors provide sufficient comment on trainees' achievement and areas for improvement. Trainees do not benefit from observing, at first hand, best practice in the use of assessment to support learning. For example, in cases, where trainees have achieved pass criteria, there has been no comment or guidance on how they could have achieved a higher grade. Where detailed feedback is provided this is rarely translated into clear targets for improvement in trainees' professional development records (PDR); although better practice was noted in teaching practice observation documentation.

## Management and quality assurance of provision

29. Systems and procedures for the selection and recruitment of trainees are good across the network. Arrangements for the recruitment of trainees on

to part-time and full-time courses at the university are very thorough. Interview processes are clearly documented with clear criteria for assessment and selection.

30. In the best partner colleges, there are clear links between initial teacher training, human resources and quality improvement. The recruitment, selection, induction and continuing professional development of staff are well-integrated processes. In these colleges, the demands on trainees' time are understood and suitable workplace support is adequately resourced. In a few colleges these links are underdeveloped.

31. The university and partner colleges meet the statutory requirements for the implementation and monitoring of policies on equal opportunities and the promotion of good race relations. However, equality and diversity impact measures are not given sufficient consideration within individual provider or network-wide self-evaluations.

32. Leadership and management of the courses in most of the network colleges are strong. Quality assurance and the rigour of self-evaluation within FE colleges are good. However, the interface between the colleges' self-evaluation and the university's own quality assurance procedure is underdeveloped. For example, the quality of some of the annual monitoring reports completed by the colleges for the university is poor. Similarly, the depth and detail contained in the university reports is too variable. Until recently, the university has not had a clear overview of the strengths and weaknesses of its own or the network provision. University link tutors now take a more prominent role in monitoring and evaluating the quality of provision within individual colleges. Quality assurance systems have been realigned to ensure greater coherence between each of the different stages of the review and evaluation process.

33. The university has taken swift action to address variations in the quality of training across the partnership, including an audit of best practice in network colleges. Where particular strengths have been identified, college representatives have been invited to share this good practice more widely and to take a lead on supporting improvements across the network. This development has had a positive impact on individual centres and they have an increasing sense of involvement in, and ownership of, the partnership.

34. Management structures have been strengthened and the university has taken the lead in providing a clear steer on curriculum innovation and quality improvement. Although the network has yet to articulate the vision in a clear plan, outlining its strategy and arrangements to sustain future developments, significant improvements have enhanced the quality of trainees' experience across centres.

35. The university has been slow to harness the potential of data to identify cross-network trends, for example in trainees' achievements, recruitment and retention. High quality data are now available but have yet to be analysed sufficiently to inform management decisions and planning for further improvement.

36. The contributions made by external examiners are detailed and comprehensive. The university provides a response on action to be taken as a result of recommendations made. However, not all points raised by examiners are addressed, for example the need for a more staged and programmed approach to the observation of trainees and closer monitoring of trainee progress on the flexi-mode.

## Appendix

The following providers were members of the HEI network at the time of inspection:

Belfast Institute of Further and Higher Education  
Bexley College  
Bracknell and Wokingham College  
Brockenhurst College  
Bromley College of Further and Higher Education  
Brooklands College  
Havant College  
Havering College of Further and Higher Education  
Hertfordshire Consortium (Oaklands College, West Hertfordshire College, North Hertfordshire College, Hertford Regional College)  
Kingston College of Further Education  
Medway Adult and Community Learning Service  
North East Worcestershire College  
North West Kent College  
Penwith College  
Salisbury College  
South East Essex College  
St Vincent College  
Totton College  
Uxbridge College  
West Kent College