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A further education teacher training
inspection report
2006/07

Managing Inspector
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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 FE teachers, both published in 2004. It was conducted in two phases by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and two Additional Inspectors. Inspectors evaluated the Certificate in Education (Cert Ed) at one of the university's partner colleges. During the first phase, which took place in October 2006, inspectors focused on the quality of training and management and quality assurance procedures. During the second phase, they concentrated on evaluating the achievements of trainees through observing their teaching and gathering evidence of their progress during the course. The second phase of the inspection was completed in June 2007.

Background

2. Liverpool John Moores University works in partnership with three FE colleges to provide part-time initial teacher training courses for FE teachers and other trainers employed in the post-compulsory sector. The provision includes a 12-week, stand-alone introductory course; a one year course leading to the award of an Initial Certificate in Teaching, Training and Learning (ICTTL), and a two year, in-service course leading to the award of the Cert Ed. Trainees in possession of a first degree have the option of undertaking a Post Graduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) as an alternative to the second year of the Cert Ed; this includes three modules of study at Masters level. The courses are delivered through the three colleges, with the university taking overall responsibility for management of the partnership, quality assurance of the provision, and course development. The courses lead to endorsed qualifications and satisfy the Secretary of State's requirements for FE teacher training. At the time of the inspection 119 trainees were following the Cert Ed course, with a further 76 trainees following the ICTTL course.

Effectiveness of provision

3. The overall quality of provision is good (grade 2). The suite of training programmes offered by the university provides a progressive route from introductory work in teacher training through to Masters level study. The high quality structure and content of the individual courses supports trainees' development as professionals who show a strong commitment to raising their students' achievement. Teacher trainers are well-qualified and very supportive; they have a clear understanding of their roles and responsibilities. The quality of specialist subject mentoring in the workplace is too inconsistent; current arrangements do not always ensure good coherence between subject mentoring and other aspects of the training. Nevertheless, there are good opportunities for trainees to develop knowledge, skills and understanding of their specialist teaching areas through

detailed discussion with colleagues, and assignments effectively support this aspect of the training. Trainees' strengths and areas for development are not consistently recorded in individual learning plans. There is much good quality documentation to support all aspects of the training; for example, the new handbook for mentors is clear and comprehensive. The partnership is well-managed by university staff, who carry out their roles with enthusiasm and rigour. All those involved in the partnership have established an excellent working relationship and have responded quickly and diligently in addressing identified weaknesses. As a consequence, steps have already been taken to build on the strengths of the provision, whilst at the same time dealing with weaker aspects. Towards the end of the inspection, there was evidence of the positive impact of some of these changes; others, however, will not be fully embedded and implemented until the forthcoming academic year.

Key strengths

Inspectors identified the following strengths:

- trainees' professionalism and dedication to raising their students' achievement
- particularly well-designed suite of training programmes
- high quality and dynamic course structure and content, which reflects current developments in FE
- well-qualified and experienced tutors who provide good quality support and guidance
- good quality documentation that provides clear guidance to trainees and trainers
- good arrangements for collaborative working through which all stakeholders contribute to the delivery, monitoring and development of the training programmes
- good management of the partnership by university staff
- very good use of a wide range of evaluative information in modifying, adapting and improving the provision.

Areas for attention

The partnership should address:

- the variability in the quality of subject mentoring
- the lack of coherence between subject mentoring and other aspects of the training
- the lack of consistency in recording and tracking trainees' strengths and areas for development.

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

Achievements of trainees

4. Trainees are enthusiastic professionals who show high levels of dedication to their work. They demonstrate a particularly strong commitment to raising the achievement of their students, and are skilled in forming very good working relationships. They often act as good role models for students, exemplifying positive attitudes towards learning, and have a thorough knowledge of issues relating to diversity and equality of opportunity. Trainees are strongly motivated to develop their skills further. The great majority think critically about their teaching on a regular basis and constantly investigate new teaching strategies, subsequently evaluating their impact on the learning of all students. Although all trainees reflect on and evaluate their work, a small minority do not focus sufficiently on the factors that influence students' learning.

5. Trainees are well-qualified in their specialist subject areas. Many have very wide-ranging experience, including work in industry, business and the community, which equips them very well for their roles as teachers. Such knowledge is often woven effectively into trainees' teaching, and they are keen to share their experiences with students, including, where appropriate, their understanding of industry trends. They have thorough knowledge of the courses they teach, including examination specifications. Through some particularly good work in subject teams within the colleges, such as discussion with experienced colleagues, they develop a secure knowledge of pedagogy.

6. Sessions are typically well planned and feature clear learning objectives. Many trainees plan carefully differentiated activities based on their assessment of students' skills and level of ability. The great majority of trainees use a variety of teaching strategies to suit the needs of their students. For example, one trainee

successfully used an effective balance of whole-group discussion, paired work and individual study in order to sustain students' engagement. Another maintained a brisk pace by moving quickly from one activity to another, using humour very effectively to motivate students. In a small minority of cases, trainees were less creative and used a limited range of strategies, which slowed students' progress.

7. The majority of trainees consider the literacy and numeracy needs of their students by devising tasks to support their development in these areas. For example, one trainee modified a single task given to the class in order to provide an opportunity for some to develop writing skills. The trainees themselves are skilled in the use of information and communication technology (ICT) to enhance their teaching; lessons featured some particularly good use of interactive whiteboard technology. Classes are managed confidently; trainees use resources well, and have a good knowledge of health and safety issues.

8. The use of formative assessment, particularly on an individual basis, is a strong feature of trainees' teaching. They are able to quickly assess students' work and provide good quality feedback, including guidance on how the work can be improved. Written feedback to students is largely of good quality, although in a few cases comments are too brief. All trainees monitor and assess students' progress on a regular basis; the best trainees are particularly skilled in the use of a range of assessment strategies, such as peer assessment and self-assessment.

Quality of training

9. Course modules are very well designed and include a range of highly relevant training activities, all of which combine to progressively build trainees' confidence and skills as teachers. There is a good balance of theory and practical work, and assignments support the training effectively. Provision for the development of trainees' skills in language, literacy, numeracy and ICT is satisfactory. Trainees on the Cert Ed course who possess a first degree have the option of transferring to the more demanding PGCE route for the final two terms of the course; however, at the present time very few choose to do this, and the provider is currently investigating ways of addressing this issue.

10. The overall quality of college-based training is good. Tutors are well-qualified, highly experienced, and strongly committed to their work as trainers. They work hard to ensure that their professional knowledge is up-to-date and are very well informed of current developments in the FE sector. Training sessions are planned well with clear links to the FENTO Standards; objectives are clearly expressed so that trainees can easily assess their own progress at the end of a session. Tutors typically model good practice by using a variety of teaching and learning styles in order to engage and motivate trainees. A strength of college-based training sessions is the way in which tutors draw on the diverse experience of trainees to enrich discussions and other activities. This is very effective in developing trainees' understanding of teaching in a variety of contexts.

11. Trainees benefit from the support of subject mentors. All trainees have the opportunity to develop their subject knowledge and pedagogy, to some extent, through discussion with colleagues, and assignments ensure that subject-specific issues are addressed. A number of mentors, who hold advanced lecturer status, provide exemplary specialist support to their trainees. A minority of trainees received very little guidance from subject mentors. In all cases there is a lack of coherence between subject mentoring and other aspects of the training; the input of subject mentors, particularly in terms of their assessment of trainees, is not formally integrated into the course structure. The partnership has modified arrangements for subject mentoring in line with new requirements, and from September 2007 all trainees will be formally allocated to a subject mentor at the start of the course.

12. Systems for recording trainees' strengths and development needs, for example, through individual learning plans, are not applied consistently by teacher trainers across the programme. Nevertheless, opportunities for personal tutoring are frequent and flexible, and trainees benefit from the chance to discuss their progress in detail. Good quality support is provided to trainees with particular needs, such as those with dyslexia.

13. Assessment procedures are thorough, and understood clearly by trainees and tutors. All modules are separately assessed, and it is mandatory for trainees to obtain a pass in each module in order to gain the overall award. Tutors provide very good quality written feedback to trainees, both on assignment work and practical teaching, and as a consequence trainees have an accurate awareness of their progress towards meeting the Standards. Recent enhancements to procedures for moderation have resulted in rigorous and accurate assessment of trainees' achievements. In particular, newly introduced arrangements for the moderation of trainees' teaching have been particularly successful, and these improvements to procedures are helping to establish consistency in assessment across the partnership.

Management and quality assurance of provision

14. Candidates for the courses can apply either through the university or directly to one of the partner colleges. At the time of Phase 1 of the inspection, there was no evidence of a coherent approach to recruitment and selection across the partnership; individual colleges followed separate procedures, and the university had little input at this stage. However, during the year these procedures were extensively revised; a set of common systems, agreed by all partners, were put into place, and this has resulted in much greater consistency across the colleges. In addition, university staff now have greater input at the selection stage, including being present at some interviews. Care is taken to ensure that trainees are placed on the most suitable course.

15. Candidates recruited prior to this year were required to undertake an initial diagnostic assessment in order to ensure that they had the necessary level of

competence in the key skills in language, literacy and numeracy, with an ICT audit carried out later. This exercise had limited use as an audit of strengths and training needs; the partnership recognised this, and procedures have now been modified. In order to ensure that trainees have the necessary skills to complete the course, applicants are required to demonstrate their competence in key skills prior to application. Procedures for auditing trainees' strengths and weaknesses have also been improved and are now more thorough.

16. Personnel from each college collaborate successfully in the management of the partnership, and the work of the group is overseen very effectively by course leaders based at the university. Meetings are frequent, and involve tutors as well as course managers. During this year in particular, the partnership has made very good progress in developing the training programmes; there is much sharing of good practice across the partner colleges, and tutors are keen to pool ideas. As a result, a number of commonly used forms and procedures have been designed and endorsed for use across the partnership. There is a very strong sense of ownership of the programmes by all involved in the partnership. Representatives from one college, which joined the partnership within the last year, remarked on the excellent support received from personnel from other colleges, and also the course leaders from the university.

17. The roles of those involved in the management of the partnership are clearly understood by all, and representatives from each college are allocated particular responsibilities matched to their own areas of expertise. Course leaders at the university take overall responsibility for keeping abreast of current developments in FE teacher training, including new requirements. They pass on this information regularly to others involved in the partnership, and issues affecting the management and delivery of the training programme are discussed in much detail.

18. Course managers at the university have worked hard to lead the development of a revised suite of programmes designed to meet new requirements. Together with other stakeholders, they have designed a coherent and progressive set of routes that caters for the needs of future teachers within the sector. The partnership has produced some particularly good quality documentation, which is clearly written and provides much useful help and guidance to trainees and trainers alike. Recently produced documentation, such as the new handbook for mentors, is particularly helpful to those preparing to undertake this role.

19. Systems for assuring the quality of training across the partnership have improved over the past year. There is an effective cycle of improvement planning, monitoring and evaluation of the provision. Those with management responsibilities regularly scrutinise documentation completed by trainers and have regular contact with them, including telephone conversations with those working outside of the college settings. Trainees are asked to give informal feedback on the quality of training received, and from September 2007 these arrangements will be formalised. Course managers at the university maintain a comprehensive overview of the delivery of the programmes across the partnership, and feed this information into course development.

20. During the course of the inspection, those involved in the partnership worked successfully in responding to external feedback from a number of sources, with a view to improving the quality of provision. They also carried out a great deal of work in order to ensure that new requirements for FE teacher training from September 2007 would be fully met. In responding to these challenges with verve and vigour, representatives from the partnership have shown that they are creative and flexible in their thinking, and extremely committed to their work.