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A further education teacher training
inspection report
2006/07

Managing Inspector
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The inspection

1. This inspection was carried out in accordance with the Framework for the inspection of initial training of further education teachers and the guidance in the Handbook for the inspection of initial training of further education (FE) teachers, both published in September 2004.
2. The inspection was carried out in two phases by a core inspection team which comprised two Additional Inspectors and one of Her Majesty's Inspectors. During the first phase in November 2006 inspectors focused on the quality of training and management and quality assurance procedures. During the second phase, inspectors concentrated on the achievements of 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

3. The university provides initial teacher training (ITT) for teachers of further education and other trainers in the post-compulsory sector, who specialise in teaching Skills for Life. It offers an in-service certificate course which combines specialist accreditation for teachers of literacy, numeracy or English for speakers of other languages (ESOL), with a generic ITT qualification. Trainees follow both generic and specialist elements, either through a 'slow mode' over two years which requires half-a-day training each week, or a 'fast mode' over one year, which requires one day of training each week. The inspection gave attention to both specialist and generic elements.
4. This year 24 trainees enrolled on the certificate, including ten following the literacy programme, seven the numeracy programme and seven the ESOL programme. The taught certificate course is located in a specialist Skills for Life centre in the university.

Effectiveness of provision

5. The overall quality of provision is adequate (grade 3). While trainees make substantial progress, not all reach sufficiently high professional standards. The quality of their planning and teaching is too variable. Most trainees work in particularly challenging work places, some of which provide a narrow teaching experience. Trainees benefit from highly responsive and inclusive provision, committed and expert teacher trainers and excellent specialist resources. Opportunities for access and progression are well designed.

6. The quality of university-based training is high. Mentoring arrangements have been introduced this year, supported by mentor training and a suitable handbook. However, trainees' experiences of mentoring are too variable. Individual trainee needs are assessed carefully, well recorded and addressed appropriately. New systems are in place for focusing and tracking progress but these arrangements are not yet operating consistently. Assignments support trainees in developing competence, although assessment criteria are not always clear. Feedback on assignments and teaching is constructive and, in the case of feedback on teaching, particularly detailed and effective. Induction arrangements are well designed.

7. Roles and responsibilities for ITT are set out clearly and are understood and implemented by teacher trainers. Strong attention is given to the professional development of teacher trainers, and, more recently, mentors. Moderation of written assignments is thorough. In the case of the assessment of teaching, moderation is less comprehensive. The university responds rapidly to any identified weaknesses, undertakes thorough self review and has in place suitable improvement plans.

Key Strengths

Inspectors identified the following strengths:

- trainees make good progress given their starting point.
- good training sessions that model best practice
- specialist delivery and assessment of training by very well qualified subject specialists in a very well equipped specialist centre
- wide-ranging opportunities for access and progression
- well designed induction arrangements
- carefully focused group profiles, which summarise the backgrounds, needs and contexts of individual trainees and provide an excellent basis for training which meets individual needs
- very detailed and constructive feedback on trainees' teaching.

Areas for Attention

The partnership should address:

- variability in the professional competence of trainees

- trainees' relatively narrow experiences of teaching
- inconsistencies in the implementation of individual learning plan (ILP) arrangements
- inconsistencies in mentoring
- lack of clarity in assessment criteria

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

Achievements of trainees

8. Overall, trainees demonstrate satisfactory levels of competence. They make substantial progress during their training. In their planning and teaching, they draw on approaches modelled in training sessions, and, in the case of the most proficient, make very effective and explicit use of the theoretical perspectives they have learnt. Others are less adept at using theory to interrogate practice. Nevertheless, trainees recognise clearly how the training has contributed to their professional development, and demonstrate a strong determination to extend their competence further, seeking out advice, making good use of feedback and undertaking relevant reading

9. Trainees adopt a professional approach to teaching, are highly motivated and grow in confidence. They work hard to cope with the demands of the course, even where they have heavy teaching loads, although occasionally they struggle to juggle these expectations with enhancing their subject expertise.

10. All trainees are committed to removing barriers to learning and raising the achievement of their students, and are very skilful in developing effective relationships with them. They display a calm and relaxed manner.

11. The most competent trainees evaluate their teaching regularly and perceptively and make good use of feedback from students to improve practice. For instance, they encourage students to use post-its to identify strengths in their teaching and to note any areas of concern. Frequently, trainees fail to create precise enough professional development targets to focus their action plans.

12. While all trainees have acquired good professional knowledge and the subject expertise they need for the courses they teach, they do not all possess the depth of specialist knowledge necessary to give real confidence or

for teaching higher level courses. A number fail to perceive the relevance of general theoretical perspectives for the teaching of their specialism. Invariably, trainees give strong emphasis to inclusion, though they are not all fully aware of how to promote equality and tackle discrimination.

13. Despite the progress they make, the quality of trainees' planning and teaching is variable. The best planning is exemplary. It takes account of external requirements, is focused by sharply defined learning objectives, and is well structured, very thorough, and carefully timed. Teaching introduces an increasingly wide range of methods, tasks and resources, including ICT. Well designed activities engage students and stimulate their interest, often through purposeful paired and group work. In the best planning and teaching, close attention is given to students' individual needs and learning preferences. Mostly, trainees manage the learning environment effectively; and their students participate enthusiastically.

14. Trainees are informed about the nature of assessment and different types of assessment. Most undertake effective diagnostic assessment and create helpful group profiles. They use this information to inform planning and teaching. The more skilful also draw on the outcomes of regular assessment as a basis for planning, and are careful to match assessment methods to intended learning objectives.

Quality of training

15. The certificate course is designed carefully to provide specialist initial teacher training in literacy, numeracy and English for speakers of other languages (ESOL). It takes account of the general national standards and the relevant subject specifications and gives very close attention to subject knowledge, subject pedagogy, key national policies and relevant theoretical perspectives. Information and communication technology (ICT) is embedded into training and trainees are encouraged to exploit ICT in their own teaching. The separate specialist strands do not all give the same systematic attention to addressing the minimum core of understanding and skills in relation to literacy, numeracy and language. Insufficient emphasis is given generally to promoting equality and dealing with discrimination.

16. Induction arrangements are well designed and substantial. They give attention to particular subject needs, encourage an effective group dynamic and help trainees to grasp the significance of the specialist training they have decided to follow.

17. The quality of training sessions is good. Effective practice is modelled consciously. Sessions are characterised by clear and detailed planning, the skilful use of well chosen resources, a variety of purposeful teaching and learning activities, including well handled group work, and

careful attention to specified learning needs. Teacher trainers are very familiar with trainees' teaching contexts; in training sessions they make suitable reference to the workplace and encourage trainees to draw on their teaching experiences. Trainees contribute effectively and enthusiastically. Trainees are also helped to extend their expertise through micro-teaching and by observing other practitioners.

18. The university is very effective in developing a very wide range of customised courses to meet the needs of a widening spectrum of work-based trainers. Courses are offered flexibly to enable access, extend training opportunities and encourage progression. Very recently, crèche facilities have been introduced as a further mechanism to support access.

19. Consequently, trainees on the certificate course now come with less substantial professional experience than previously and from a very wide variety of backgrounds and teaching contexts, some of which present considerable challenges for trainees and teacher trainers alike. Frequently, trainees' teaching contexts, particularly in the voluntary sector, are precarious as a result of uncertain funding, and working conditions are less than ideal. For instance, some trainees are exposed to weak professional practice, have limited access to ICT or are faced by difficult groups, for instance teaching large groups of students with very wide ranging needs, including many with little or no literacy or schooling in their own language.

20. The training gives close attention to addressing challenging teaching contexts as well as the limited range and level of teaching available to some trainees. Both workplace and teaching opportunities are checked and logged at interview, and teaching is monitored thereafter with a view to ensuring that trainees gain experience of teaching at least two levels. The programme has in place innovative procedures, designed to broaden trainees' experience, for instance through programmed visits or contributing to specialist courses run by teacher trainers from the university, and plans are in hand to run training classes at the university. Even so, as university staff are aware, demanding circumstances and relatively narrow teaching make it hard for some trainees to demonstrate high levels of competence.

21. Teacher trainers have a detailed knowledge of trainees' starting points as a result of careful early diagnostic assessment. All the information gleaned about trainees is incorporated into a well focused group profile. Teacher trainers meet trainees in regular formal tutorials and provide additional tutorial support unstintingly. Training is adjusted to take account of individual needs and more recently this has helped trainees to make better use of theory to support practice and critical analysis. Teacher trainers often possess the expertise necessary to address specific learning needs, such as dyslexia, or they refer trainees to the university's specialist support services.

22. The quality of mentoring is too variable. The university is grappling with creating effective mentoring arrangements for trainees in very diverse

teaching contexts. This year it is trialling a range of approaches to mentoring, and specifically provides mentor training for Skills for Life. The differentiated models are underpinned by a mentor handbook and mentor training. The latter is organised flexibly to facilitate attendance. It has also created a bank of trained mentors. An interim evaluation of mentoring indicates that mentor training has impacted positively on mentor practice and trainee experience. However, trainees' experiences of mentoring is varied, communication between teacher trainers, trainees and mentors is not sufficiently structured, the function of mentors is unclear and mentoring is not providing the regular interventions necessary to ensure that all trainees reach the highest levels of competence of which they are capable.

23. Trainee progress is not tracked and reviewed with a consistently sharp focus. The university has introduced new arrangements for monitoring trainee progress against national professional standards and relevant subject specifications, setting targets and action planning. These changes have been supported by professional development for tutors. Outcomes are not always focused sufficiently clearly on how far professional standards have been met, on strategic targets derived from the full range of available evidence, and on precise action plans designed to address such targets. Central records on each trainee are thorough and teacher trainers know their trainees well.

24. The range of assignments is varied and appropriate. Trainees can tailor the focus of assignments to their own contexts and needs and, in undertaking assignments, they are well supported, for instance through formative feedback on drafts and focused training sessions. Even so, assignment criteria and briefs are not always clear enough about the importance of relating theory to practice or about how completing the assignments can contribute to the development of professional standards and there remains some variation in the information about assignments provided by current unit guides. The best feedback on assignments is detailed and constructive, and is well supported by textual annotations.

25. Written feedback by teacher trainers after their observations of teaching is exceptionally detailed and highly constructive. It enables trainees to improve their practice. External requirements are met and additional observations are made where weakness is identified. Assessment judgments are accurate.

Management and quality assurance of provision

26. A range of suitable and effective recruitment strategies is in place. Publicity is well designed, inclusive and informative. Opportunities are available to potential applicants for face-to-face discussion and telephone or email advice.

27. Selection arrangements are documented clearly. Candidates receive rapid feedback on the outcomes, in the case of unsuccessful candidates including helpful guidance on ways forward. Although diagnostic assessment at interview gives specific information about trainees' needs, this information has not been used routinely to provide successful candidates with detailed guidance on how to remedy weaknesses in advance of the course start. Plans for relevant pre-course support are well advanced.

28. Roles and responsibilities related to teacher training are set out clearly, and are understood and implemented by teacher trainers, trainees and, increasingly, by mentors - as mentor training is implemented. Managers are skilled in accessing funding to support developments. Moreover, the programme benefits from its location in a strongly specialist centre, whose management and quality assurance systems are well integrated into those of the faculty and the wider university. The centre takes a collegial and inclusive approach to managing, developing and planning provision, though it does not yet involve representatives from the work places of trainees.

29. The excellent refurbished accommodation and extensive very high quality specialist resources and equipment are well managed and utilised very effectively in training and by trainees. Skilled technical staff give very good support. Increasing use is being made of the intranet, though there remains some way to go before this facility is exploited fully.

30. Teacher trainers are experts in specialist skills for life subjects. They have a national profile, contribute substantially to publication, research and significant projects, and are highly motivated to share their expertise. To promote quality, considerable resource is devoted to the professional development of teacher trainers, and, increasingly, to mentor training.

31. Suitable policies are in place related to equality and diversity. Although arrangements for monitoring the effectiveness of their implementation are limited in range, approaches to equality are checked during teacher trainer visits to the workplace and increasing attention is being given to analysing data on under-represented groups, supported by increased access to university data. The health and safety policy has been strengthened appropriately to support trainees in taking action where potential risks are identified in their workplace.

32. Thorough moderation arrangements are in place for written assignments, including standardisation meetings, cross-course marking and second marking, as well as sampling by the external examiner. However, moderation of the assessment of teaching, though satisfactory, is less comprehensive. It fails to include either regular joint observations between centrally-based teacher trainers and mentors or observations of trainees by the external examiner.

33. Clearly defined, review and improvement planning procedures at course and centre level draw on a wide range of appropriate evidence, including substantial trainee and tutor feedback. Teacher trainers also respond rapidly to evaluative feedback, making suitable immediate adjustments to provision. Following the interim feedback at the end of the first phase of the inspection, the university compiled a focused action plan which demonstrated a carefully considered response, including some immediate interventions, for instance support for trainees in improving their skills in critical analysis. However, it is too early to evaluate the impact of proposed developments on the quality of training and the standards attained by trainees.