

Nottingham Trent University

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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 (FE) teachers and the guidance in the Handbook for the inspection of initial training of further education teachers, both published in September 2004. It was conducted in two phases by two of Her Majesty's Inspectors and Additional Inspectors. In the first phase, which took place in January 2007, inspectors focused on the quality of training as well as the management and quality assurance of provision. 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. Nottingham Trent University works in partnership with 6 local colleges of further education (FE) to offer initial teacher training in post-compulsory education and training. Trainees are able to undertake either the certificate in education (Cert Ed) or postgraduate certificate in education (PGCE) course. The full-time pre-service course is completed over one year and is offered at the university and at one of the partner colleges. The first year of the two-year part-time in-service course is offered in all six partner colleges and three of the colleges also offer the second year. The university delivers only the second year of the programme. Both courses are endorsed qualifications and meet the requirements of the Secretary of State for further education teachers.

3. Full-time pre-service trainees are required to undertake at least 200 hours of teaching during the year. They start this early in the course and have a 6-week block placement in an FE college each term. Part-time, in-service trainees are required to complete at least 100 hours of paid practical teaching for each of the two years of the course. Courses operate within the modular credit framework of the university. A relatively high proportion of trainees progress on to a Bachelor of Education (B Ed) course or Masters degree at the university.

Effectiveness of provision

4. The overall quality of provision is good (grade 2). The taught element of the training is very effective and trainees make good progress. Teacher trainers are good role models, adept in linking theory to practice and use trainees' experiences well to enhance teaching and learning. Trainees are very well supported by tutors and all trainees have an identified workplace mentor. The level of support mentors provide for trainees is uneven across the partnership. A few trainees have too little opportunity to participate in curriculum development and assessment. The partnership has good mechanisms to secure the quality of the taught element of the training but arrangements for monitoring the quality of mentoring are less well

developed. Communications and operational management are effective. Self-evaluations are rigorous and successful in identifying issues to be addressed and strengths which can be shared. The partnership has responded well to early feedback during the inspection and has made a number of improvements as a result. Although some of these have had a demonstrable effect on trainees' experiences, this is not yet consistent across the partnership. The learning sets which are designed to encourage trainees to share best practice in their subject specialism are not well developed.

Key strengths

Inspectors identified the following strengths:

- enthusiastic trainees' who make good progress in developing their teaching skills
- self-critical culture that enables trainees to become highly effective reflective practitioners
- good training sessions led by teacher trainers who are good role models
- good support for trainees from teacher trainers and tutors
- rigorous quality assurance of the taught elements of the training leading to improvements
- good communications and effective partnership working

Areas for attention

The partnership should address:

- unevenness in the support available for trainees to develop their subject specific skills
- underdeveloped quality assurance of mentoring arrangements
- inconsistent opportunities for trainees to extend their experience in course development and assessment

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

Achievements of trainees

5. Trainees develop confidence and make good progress during their training. They are committed to the achievement of their own students and work hard to meet their needs. Pre-service trainees benefit from early experience of teaching through placements and quickly develop their teaching skills.

6. With few exceptions, trainees develop good skills in self-reflection and this helps them to challenge and improve their teaching practice. They have productive relationships with peers, mentors and tutors. In the best examples, mentors provide good role models and give helpful guidance to trainees on subject specific issues. Trainees particularly value feedback from lesson observations. A few of them are not sufficiently involved in the wider context of the courses they teach or given specific opportunities to plan for learning. For example, teaching is sometimes restricted to delivering materials provided by their mentors or others in the teaching team.

7. Typically, trainees plan their teaching well. Lessons are prepared and managed effectively. Learning outcomes are usually clear, and lesson plans indicate how students' progress will be evaluated. Most trainees ensure that their students' learning is checked regularly and have a good rapport with them. However, not all trainees use information and learning technology effectively. In a few cases PowerPoint presentations are overlong and students have too little opportunity to contribute to the session.

8. Trainees are appropriately qualified for the subjects they are teaching and often have valuable industrial and other experience to support this. They are encouraged to gain experience of teaching across a range of levels and ages of students but not all of them achieve this. Specialist and vocational resources are used effectively to extend and develop learning, particularly by in-service trainees. Trainees are less confident in taking account of the needs of the most or least able students when planning their lessons. Most groupwork is effectively managed and, on occasion, imaginatively carried out so that there is good active learning. Practical work is good, with appropriate attention to health and safety. Many trainees give due consideration to how they can meet their students' language, literacy and numeracy needs in lessons but their ability to do so is more variable.

9. Trainees' assessment practice is satisfactory overall. Where they devise assessments these are well written and at an appropriate level but written feedback is not always detailed enough to help students to improve. Learning targets are not always sufficiently focused; although trainees teaching Skills for Life subjects are often more skilled at this. A few trainees have yet to take on a

full role in assessing learning and their range of experience of assessment practice is too narrow.

10. Trainees provide good individual support in lessons and take account of their students' learning needs. In-service trainees usually have good knowledge of the wider support services available within their workplace, and can advise students accordingly if necessary. However this is not always the case for pre-service trainees who are less familiar with the range of support available within their placements.

Quality of training

11. Courses are structured well so that trainees can develop their skills and confidence incrementally. Planning for course delivery is good, and course documentation is clear and helpful. The requirements of the minimum core of language, literacy and numeracy are suitably embedded. The university has recently improved arrangements for assessing the extent to which trainees apply this knowledge in both their written assignments and in their teaching practice. Trainees are encouraged to gain teaching experience with a range of learners, including different age groups, ability levels and group sizes but a few still have a focus to their workplace experience that is too narrow; for example, teaching a single year group or level.

12. The quality of taught sessions is good and sometimes very good. Pre-service trainees are exposed to the teaching environment early in their course and all trainees are encouraged to relate theory to practice. Teacher trainers are knowledgeable and skilled. Many have extensive experience of post-compulsory or further education and are good role-models. They demonstrate a range of teaching techniques, encourage trainees to evaluate them and consider how they can introduce new and unfamiliar methods to their own students. Reflective practice is rigorously promoted and gives trainees further opportunities to develop their performance as teachers. For example, in one session, trainees were encouraged to reflect on critical incidents from their own teaching and share ideas on how these might be managed.

13. Teaching and learning resources are extensive and used well by both trainers and trainees. Course materials can be accessed online through the university's website.

14. Tutoring and support from trainers is good and trainees value this. Study skills, literacy and numeracy support, and an extensive range of advice and guidance are provided at the university and in partner colleges. Tutorial sessions provide opportunities for trainees to discuss their assignment work and plan their further development. However, the actions which are agreed as a result are occasionally too vague to be helpful.

15. Trainees have a good understanding of how well they are progressing. Assignments are carefully designed to allow trainees to explore aspects of FE in the context of their own subjects. Written feedback on assessed work is often detailed and helpful. Trainees are encouraged to action plan both before and after they complete their assignments. In the best examples, targets from one observation of teaching practice fed forward to the next. Improvement targets arising from feedback on a piece of written work were restated on the front sheet of the next, along with the trainee's action plan, indicating how they would be addressed this time.

16. All trainees have a workplace mentor and many receive good guidance and support from them; however the time allocated to mentors to undertake this role is very variable because of the differing policies and practice of individual employers.

17. All mentors receive a guidance pack, but not all have been trained to use it. Of the eight lesson observations which trainees must pass, four are assessed by their mentor. Arrangements to moderate the outcomes of mentor observation of trainees teaching are at an early stage of development. Though the university has recently improved overall procedures for the assessment of teaching practice, feedback to trainees does not offer sufficient consideration to subject specific issues. Not all trainees give a high enough priority to engagement in the learning sets designed to improve their subject specialist teaching skills as this is not yet an assessed element of the course. Take up of this aspect of the training is patchy

Management and quality assurance of provision

18. Initial teacher training is well integrated with human resources and continuing professional development (CPD) in partner colleges. In one college some of the CPD offered to college staff is available to trainees on the course from other institutions. Course entry requirements are clear and well understood. All those who are accepted on university-validated programmes are checked through the Criminal Records Bureau. Interview processes for pre-service trainees are particularly rigorous and entry requirements are stringently applied. For in-service trainees, entry requirements are more flexible. All entrants are required to demonstrate minimum core skills of literacy and numeracy at level 2, and all are tested for these skills prior to entry. Trainees with identified learning needs are well supported.

19. All partner institutions monitor recruitment by ethnicity and gender and have their own data on achievement; this data is not yet used in a systematic way across the partnership to inform planning for improvement. A small number of partner colleges actively recruit to under-represented groups and are

successful in widening participation. Aspects of equality of opportunity are regularly discussed in course teams.

20. Operational management of the provision is good both within individual colleges and across the partnership. Communication between colleges and the university is regular and constructive. The partnership coordinator acts as a conduit for good communications and is helping to secure consistency of practice across providing institutions. Roles and responsibilities are clear and are understood throughout the partnership.

21. The university, and most of the partner colleges, self-assess the provision rigorously. The process is self-critical and has accurately identified points for improvement. Actions to bring about these improvements are realistic and are monitored effectively. Both the colleges and the university undertake trainee perception surveys, and the results are used to inform the overall self-evaluation process.

22. The quality assurance of most aspects of the provision is good. The moderation of trainees' assignment work is thorough, and ensures that standards are even across the partnership. Moderation of marking occurs within institutions and between institutions in line with university requirements. External examiners provide helpful feedback on the assessment of written coursework and action points are followed up. However these arrangements do not extend to the observation of the assessment of trainees' teaching practice.

23. Procedures to monitor the effectiveness of mentoring arrangements are not fully embedded. Consequently, trainees' experiences of subject specific support are too variable. Communication links between tutors and mentors are not yet sufficiently well developed.

24. The university has taken steps to improve the sharing of good practice across the partnership. This includes opportunities for college staff involved in the delivery of the course to attend university events. The partnership has taken prompt action to address many of the issues identified during the early stages of the inspection.