



# Oxford Brookes University

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A further education teacher training  
inspection report  
2006/07

Managing Inspector  
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## Background

1. Oxford Brookes University works in partnership with four colleges of further education (FE) in the Oxfordshire area to provide initial teacher training (ITT) courses for FE teachers and trainers in the post-compulsory sector. University training is located at the Westminster Institute of Education. The provision leads to the university's post-graduate certificate of education (PGCE) and/or certificate of education (Cert Ed) qualifications. These are endorsed qualifications which satisfy the Secretary of State's requirements for FE teachers. Two training routes are available: a full-time pre-service course on which 34 trainees were enrolled, and a part-time in-service course on which 132 trainees were enrolled. Most in-service trainees work in FE colleges but around 40% work in other contexts, such as in adult and community learning.
2. The pre-service course lasts for one academic year. On completion of an initial five-week introductory unit at the university, trainees spend three days a week in a college placement during the main programme and attend the university for the other two days.
3. The in-service course is designed as a two-year programme, with possible entry directly into the second year of certificate courses. Often this is on the basis of City and Guilds 7407 stage 2 certification. There is also provision for individual entry through the assessment of prior experience and learning and completion of an advanced standing module. In-service trainees attend weekly sessions, either during the day or in the evening. All training is delivered by university or university-approved teacher trainers.

## The inspection

4. The inspection was carried out in accordance with the Framework for the inspection of initial teacher training of further education (FE) teachers and the guidance in the Handbook for the inspection of initial teacher training of further education teachers, both published in 2004.
5. The inspection was carried out in two phases by a core inspection team which comprised of two members of Her Majesty's Inspectorate. Two additional specialist inspectors joined the team for part of phase two. Pre-service provision at the university and in-service provision at one college were evaluated as part of the inspection. Account was also taken of provision elsewhere. 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.

## Effectiveness of provision

6. The overall quality of provision is good (grade 2). Trainees demonstrate a strong commitment to raising students' achievements and to equality of opportunity. Programmes are well balanced and set high standards for trainees. The quality of centre-based training is good, and trainees' experience is substantially enriched by teacher trainers' extensive research activities and involvement in current national educational developments. Tutorial support is good. Workplace support for the development of trainees' subject specialist skills is extensive, but is inconsistent in delivery. Formal links between mentors and teacher trainers are insufficiently developed.

7. Leadership is very good, and the partnership demonstrates a particularly clear strategic view of its role. Partner colleges are supported well, particularly in relation to the professional development of all teacher trainers. There are robust university and college quality assurance processes to evaluate and address any areas for attention. The tracking and monitoring of mentoring arrangements are not sufficiently consistent. Managers are responsive and have been prompt in addressing identified areas for improvement.

## Key Strengths

Inspectors identified the following strengths:

- good teaching skills demonstrated by trainees
- high quality teaching and learning programmes, firmly grounded in the wide ranging research activities of teacher trainers
- very good teaching by teacher trainers
- good support for trainees
- strong and supportive partnership, with very good leadership

## Areas for attention

The partnership should address:

- inconsistencies in the quality of mentoring and subject specialist support
- the development of trainees' skills in numeracy and information and communication technology (ICT) to support their professional roles

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

## Achievements of trainees

8. Most trainees have good teaching skills and are committed to raising their students' achievements. They are eager to advance their own professional development and continually seek ways to improve their skills. Trainees welcome the constructive feedback provided by teacher trainers, mentors and peers as a basis for further reflection and development. Trainees' written work is generally of a high standard, linking theory effectively with practice, and is mostly well researched and presented.

9. Trainees set high standards and challenging targets which allow their students to gain new knowledge and skills, and to grow as individuals. However, a small minority of trainees do not always set sufficiently challenging targets for the more able students. Trainees show clear commitment to equality of opportunity and a good awareness of 'Every Child Matters' themes. Trainees who teach Skills for Life subjects demonstrate a particular commitment to supporting disadvantaged students.

10. The subject and vocational knowledge of trainees is suitable for the range of courses they teach. Trainees generally make good use of this knowledge and their wider life experience to make their teaching directly relevant to the needs of students. However, for a few pre-service trainees, further development of aspects of their subject knowledge is required so that they are appropriately prepared to teach a wider range of students and levels.

11. Planning for teaching and learning is detailed and effective. Trainees define clear aims and objectives for sessions. The best trainees plan well to support different levels of learning in the same group, with carefully planned activities for individual students; although individual learning plans are not always used effectively. Trainees employ a good range of teaching and learning activities, and use effective questioning technique. For a minority of in-service trainees, the information and learning technology (ILT) knowledge and skills they acquire on their programme are not sufficiently reinforced within their teaching, often because of practical limitations on resources in their workplace.

12. Trainees quickly establish and maintain an excellent rapport with their students. They create a relaxed and productive learning environment, and effectively promote collaborative working among adult students. Classes are well managed. Although most pre-service trainees have less classroom experience than in-service trainees, they also demonstrate effective classroom management skills, with the best of them dealing very effectively with the potentially challenging behaviour of some students.

13. Trainees are well informed about the nature and purposes of assessment and about the requirements of the courses they teach. They monitor students' progress carefully and provide constructive feedback. Trainees in adult and community learning set regular homework for adult classes to consolidate new learning outside their weekly sessions. Those teaching Skills for Life subjects set detailed personal targets for their students.

14. Trainees support their students well in a discrete and positive manner, including much helpful, individual support for students. Students feel encouraged and motivated by this support. In-service trainees in FE colleges and adult and community learning are familiar with the range of more specialist support services available for students. Trainees with less teaching experience do not always manage the various professional demands made on them by individual learners effectively.

## Quality of training

15. The course structure is carefully designed and leads to a well balanced programme which effectively links theory with practice through classroom activities and practical assignments. There is a strong ethos and emphasis in the partnership on high quality teaching and learning.

16. Teacher trainers are very well-qualified, enthusiastic and strongly committed to the trainees. They routinely model good practice which is recognised and adopted by trainees in their own teaching. Teacher trainers have a very clear understanding of their professional roles, and work very closely with colleagues across the partnership to maintain and improve the quality of training.

17. Training sessions are well planned. Teacher trainers make particularly effective use of current wide ranging research activities and their direct involvement in key national developments to benefit trainees. This is particularly valuable in helping trainees, both pre-service and in-service, to understand the changes and issues affecting the FE context in which they teach.

18. The quality of the training sessions is good. Teaching is planned well and makes use of an extensive range of imaginative activities and resources, including ICT skills. Teacher trainers emphasise very effectively the development of reflective skills in trainees, and this leads to a strong sense of professionalism, particularly among in-service trainees.

19. A culture of mutual support and shared working is engendered successfully between trainees, particularly on pre-service programmes. An effective focus on equality and diversity runs throughout the programme.

20. The quality of workplace support is often good, and both pre-service and in-service trainees are supported well by their mentors and workplace colleagues. However, mentoring arrangements are not yet fully developed, and not all mentors have received sufficient training. Contributions made by mentors and subject specialists are often of high quality, but they are not always sufficiently linked to the input, observations, assessment and feedback provided by teacher trainers. Mentors' assessment of trainees' progress in developing their subject specialist skills is not always clearly recorded against agreed criteria.

21. Assessment arrangements are appropriate and well documented. Assignments are supported by comprehensive module handbooks. Teacher trainers provide encouraging and constructive feedback to trainees on their progress. In trainees' written assignments, they challenge trainees to reflect further, and for observed teaching, they give clear guidance to trainees on actions to improve.

22. Initial assessment of trainees' literacy and numeracy skills is thorough, and coverage of the minimum core is generally effective. Clear support is provided for the development of trainees' skills in literacy and numeracy. However, the development of trainees' skills in numeracy does not always focus sufficiently on their professional roles and there is insufficient planning at present to meet trainees' individual development needs in ICT.

23. Coursework and related documentation have been thoroughly revised for September 2007 to take account of national requirements. Teacher trainers have acted promptly on feedback. For example, they have already further strengthened opportunities for pre-service trainees to share experiences gained on placement, and have reinforced references to the wider FE context within training sessions.

## Management and quality assurance of provision

24. The university partnership offers a wide range of initial teacher training and continuing professional development programmes for teachers. Marketing of courses is effective, and candidates receive detailed and accurate information about the programmes and progression opportunities. Selection processes are very thorough and result in the choice of suitable trainees. Clear arrangements are in place for the accreditation of existing teachers' experience and qualifications.

25. The partnership is very effectively led and managed. It has clear direction and has maintained a particularly close involvement in several key areas of the national reform of initial teacher training.
26. There is a strong collegiate approach which promotes very effective partnership working, and supports partner colleges well. The management of the partnership is open and responsive, and encourages a self-critical approach which leads to continuous improvement. College representatives are fully involved in all strategic and operational aspects of the partnership.
27. The partnership has a strong commitment to equality of opportunity and diversity, which is reflected in the careful monitoring of recruitment data and in the subsequent delivery of programmes.
28. Partnership arrangements are very well documented, and the regular communications between partner institutions are effective and constructive. There is particularly strong encouragement and opportunities provided for the professional development of staff from partner colleges.
29. The university has well-established and robust internal quality assurance processes covering all main aspects of provision. External examiners are appointed for PGCE and Cert Ed courses, although they do not observe trainees teach. Each partner college conducts its own regular monitoring and annual review, and effective moderation arrangements are in place to assure the accuracy of assessment of written coursework.
30. Monitoring processes to ensure the consistency of mentoring and subject specialist support are not yet fully developed. The partnership recognises this and has taken a number of positive steps to address the issue. For example, it has implemented a system of joint observation and standardisation between mentors and teacher trainers. It has also appointed an internal verifier to co-ordinate, track and monitor the quality of mentoring across the partnership. It is too soon to comment on the overall impact of these measures.
31. The partnership has a strong commitment to self evaluation and improvement. It has developed a detailed action plan covering areas for attention identified during the course of the inspection. Further changes are being clearly incorporated into the revised programme to be delivered from September 2007.



## Appendix list of colleges

The following colleges were members of the partnership at the time of the inspection:

- Newbury College
- Henley College
- Milton Keynes College
- Swindon College