



# University of Plymouth

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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 two of Her Majesty's Inspectors 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 of Plymouth works in partnership with eight colleges of further education (FE) across the South West to provide initial teacher training (ITT) courses for FE teachers and other trainers in the post compulsory sector. Several centres offer training on a number of sites. University training takes place on three university sites, seven military bases and in five prisons. Provision includes both a generic pathway and a specialist pathway for teachers of literacy, numeracy and English for speakers of other languages (ESOL). The provision leads to the university's postgraduate certificate of education (PGCE) and/or certificate of education (Cert Ed). 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 142 trainees were enrolled, and a part-time in-service course on which 1467 trainees were enrolled. Around 5% of trainees follow the specialist pathway. Approximately half of the in-service trainees work in education and training settings outside of FE colleges.

3. The pre-service course lasts for one academic year. Each week trainees spend two days in a college placement, two days in centrally taught sessions and one day on independent study. The in-service course is designed as a two year programme. Advanced standing is offered into the second year, usually on the basis of successful completion of the City and Guilds 7407 stage 2 FE teachers certificate. In-service trainees attend centrally-based three hour weekly sessions, either during the day or in the evening. Option modules are open to full and part-time trainees.

## Effectiveness of provision

4. The overall quality of provision is inadequate (grade 4). Although the quality of centre-based training is mostly good and pre-service trainees receive very good support in the workplace, the workplace experiences of in-service trainees are inadequate across this large and dispersed partnership.

This is particularly in the case for trainees who teach in contexts other than FE colleges and who often do not make the progress they should. Overall progress tracking is weak. Insufficient emphasis is placed key aspects of expertise, for example, the minimum core of language literacy and numeracy and 14-19 developments. Partnership-wide systems to ensure effective management and quality assurance of the university award are underdeveloped.

5. Recent management appointments have strengthened the capacity to make the improvements necessary to achieve partnership-wide consistency and to ensure that all trainees make the progress they should. These key managers have demonstrated the strategic drive to implement systems and monitor their effectiveness with the necessary rigour. However, it is too early to evaluate the impact of new developments on trainee progress, or the quality and consistency of provision across the partnership.

## Key strengths

Inspectors identified the following strengths:

- Mostly very good or good centre-based training sessions
- flexible provision which is responsive to national and local needs and offers suitable opportunities for access and progression
- collaborative approaches to planning and developing provision
- very good workplace support for pre-service trainees

## Areas for attention

The partnership should address:

- trainees' limited knowledge of significant current policies and their lack of subject breadth
- trainees' insufficient progress in developing their teaching and learning skills
- inadequate mentoring of in-service trainees
- insufficient attention to developing trainees' subject expertise in the generic course

- inadequate procedures for reviewing trainee progress, target setting and action planning
- weak management and quality assurance which has led to substantial variations in the quality of provision and trainees' experience

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

## Achievement of trainees

6. Pre-service trainees make satisfactory progress but a significant proportion of in-service trainees do not. Typically, trainees adopt a professional approach to their work. They have high expectations of their students, are sensitive to their needs and committed to supporting their learning. They develop effective relationships with their students and with other staff. Where the context allows, they make useful contributions to wider professional activities in the workplace, for instance to tutoring or curriculum development. Trainees respond to advice and take steps to improve their practice. Many are skilful in analysing their teaching and recognise the progress they have made. Their assignments are of good quality, make use of relevant generic reading, and use theory to interrogate their teaching. However, few undertake systematic and thorough written evaluations of their teaching as a means of improvement, and only the most competent focus on learning as the starting point for a critical analysis of their practice.

7. The subject or vocational knowledge of trainees is suitable for the often narrow range of courses they teach, but is rarely extended beyond this. Trainees are well aware of relevant equal opportunity and race relations requirements. They are less knowledgeable about current policy in education and training. The majority of trainees communicate clearly, have moved from a teacher to a learner-centred approach, manage behaviour appropriately and organise resources effectively. In the case of the most proficient, planning is detailed and highly focused, and supports teaching which engages students and achieves clearly defined learning objectives through well chosen, imaginative and challenging approaches and tasks.

8. In too many instances, key features of planning are omitted, underplayed or confused. For instance, learning objectives lack precision and focus on activities rather than learning; the range of learning needs, including students' language, literacy and numeracy development, is given insufficient attention and assessment is barely addressed. Some teaching lacks a clear focus on learning, employs a narrow range of unimaginative methods, tasks and resources, gives insufficient attention to the needs and interests of students and includes too few opportunities for discussion and interaction. In a number of cases, questioning is neither planned nor executed effectively. More generally, information and learning technology (ILT) is not exploited

sufficiently well to support students' learning and the expertise of learning assistants is not fully utilised.

9. Trainees' are well informed about the nature and purposes of assessment and about the assessment requirement of the courses they teach. The majority monitor and support students' progress carefully. Some make suitable use of individual learning plans (ILPs). The most competent engage students fully in setting and reviewing targets. However, too few trainees make systematic use of assessment information to inform future planning or give their students' sufficient opportunity for peer and self assessment. Most marking is clear and constructive; the best is highly specific and identifies development targets. However, a minority of marking is too brief and lacks the specificity necessary to ensure that students can make progress. Records are well maintained; the most effective include progress tracking. Trainees offer students guidance, advice and support, wherever possible formally as well as informally. Those located in FE colleges are usually familiar with the range of support services available for learners in and beyond the workplace. Part-time teachers and those located in other contexts often lack sufficient opportunities for extending their expertise in supporting students.

## Quality of training

10. The course structure is designed to encourage progression, aid the integration of theory and practice and provide for trainees' interests whilst maintaining a strong compulsory core. Differentiated learning outcomes distinguish qualification levels. Training is responsive to local and national needs, and includes a Skills for Life pathway, prison-based provision with a prison education slant and an appropriately adapted model to cater for military personnel. The partnership also provides effective opportunities for access and progression, including suitable arrangements for advanced standing into the second year of the certificate, and suitable qualification routes beyond ITT.

11. However, there are limitations in the structure of the course. Inadequate attention is given to the systematic integration of taught and workplace elements. There are also no formal arrangements to ensure breadth of teaching and assessment experience. Until very recently, neither course content nor course documentation placed sufficient emphasis on national standards, practical professional skills, and current policy priorities. Except in the case of the specialist Skills for Life pathway, the development of subject or vocational expertise is unsatisfactory. These inadequacies have led to weaknesses in trainees' expertise and have impacted adversely on trainees' progress towards achieving their full potential.

12. The course and related documentation have been rewritten for September 2007. The new course includes opportunities for non graduates to achieve a higher level qualification. Plans are in place to exploit local and

national electronic subject and vocational networks. However, firm directives have yet to be developed to ensure that all trainees gain teaching and assessment experience across a suitable range of courses and contexts and to secure the effective integration of taught and workplace provision across the partnership.

13. The quality of centre-based training sessions is mostly very good or good. Teacher trainers plan effectively and employ a suitable range of approaches and resources, including information and communication technology (ICT). They engage trainees actively in learning and professional dialogue. Pertinent guidance is provided on additional reading and research. On the generic pathway insufficient encouragement is given to motivate trainees to explore subject or vocational material and relevant national policies. Teacher trainers are familiar with trainees' teaching contexts and trainees are expected to, and do, undertake preparation and follow-up for taught sessions.

14. Pre-service trainees receive good, and sometimes excellent, subject mentoring from well informed mentors, as well as regular tutoring and productive teacher trainer visits. The triangulation of this support and training is often exemplary. Most in-service trainees are visited regularly by centre-based teacher trainers, who provide constructive support as well as assessment feedback.

15. Mentoring for many in-service trainees, particularly those working in contexts other than FE colleges, is weak, despite some increase in attention to mentor support during the year. Although further improvements are planned, inadequate mentoring has affected the progress of current in-service trainees. The implementation and monitoring of proposed developments is yet to be secured.

16. The tracking of trainee progress is inadequate. The specific needs of trainees, for instance in literacy, numeracy, study skills, ICT or subject knowledge, are not always diagnosed or addressed fully. A more comprehensive and rigorous profile, driven by the new standards for teachers and trainers in the learning and skills sector, which takes account of all assessments and requires regular documented review, target setting and action planning is planned for next year.

17. Assessment arrangements are appropriate and well documented. Feedback on both assignments and observations of teaching, guided by clearly defined criteria and prompts, is helpfully constructive. New exemplar assignments and the structuring of the new profile aim to address the limited attention given currently to national standards and, in the generic course, to subject or vocational expertise, and to encourage greater consistency across the partnership.

## Management and quality assurance of provision

18. Marketing is effective and publicity is attractive and inclusive. A higher priority is now being given to targeting under-represented groups. Candidates receive accurate and clear information about the programme and about progression opportunities in advance and at interview.

19. Recent improvements have been made to selection procedures to sharpen criteria, enhance rigour and consistency, improve interview records and ensure that successful candidates remedy deficiencies in literacy, numeracy, ICT and subject knowledge identified at interview.

20. The selection process results in the choice of suitable trainees. There is a good gender balance and the proportion of trainees from minority ethnic backgrounds is at, or above, the distribution of similar groups in the regional population – and rising. A detailed analysis and evaluation of enrolment data and trends has recently been undertaken as a basis for future analyses of trends.

21. Central accommodation and resources are suitable. However, a few trainees have to cope with poor facilities in some locations, and the extent and quality of ICT facilities varies between centres and workplaces.

22. Centre-based teacher trainers are appropriately qualified and experienced. There is an emphasis on partnership-wide professional development, including some which is tightly focused on significant development needs. However, not all key teacher trainers are regular in their attendance at important meetings and development days. Cross-institutional peer evaluation of the delivery of training has recently been put in place, as one means of addressing inconsistent practice and quality across the partnership.

23. The moderation of judgements on assignments is effective, and includes both external and internal perspectives. However, arrangements to secure the pass-fail borderline in the assessment of teaching have been less rigorous. Mentors and peers receive insufficient guidance and moderation includes insufficient joint observations and no recent moderation by external observation. New arrangements for documented cross-partner moderation of the assessment of teaching are beginning to clarify expectations.

24. Constructive external examiner reports identify issues clearly. Such issues are considered fully and addressed with some care, though not always resolved, as in the case of variations in assignment briefs across the partnership.

25. Quality assurance at partnership-wide level is weak. The quality assurance of the mentoring of in-service trainees is particularly ineffectual,



exacerbated by the failure to ensure that expectations are communicated and understood, the absence of adequate data, inadequate monitoring, and the lack of systematic evaluation of workplace experience. The lack of rigorous quality assurance has led to unacceptable inconsistencies in the nature and quality of provision. The partnership is now grappling with these weaknesses.

26. A calendared review and improvement planning cycle draws on the outcomes of a range of evaluations, as well as partner college action plans, and culminates in a partnership-wide annual monitoring report and improvement plan. However, some key weaknesses are missing, and the implementation of the cycle has lacked consistency in practice and rigour across the partnership. New structures have been put in place to systematise review and improvement planning practice.

27. The management and quality assurance of this partnership is undergoing significant changes. The university's commitment to the challenge of managing and assuring the quality of such substantial, varied and highly dispersed provision is underpinned in the recent appointment of a permanent partnership coordinator. The partnership is now embedded in a Centre for Excellence in Teacher Training (CETT). Its well focused business plan is designed to tackle a number of key weaknesses in the partnership, in particular in mentoring and in the links between centre and work-based provision.

28. Recent developments in the arrangements for management and quality assurance indicate capacity for securing further improvements. These recent developments include clarification of roles and responsibilities, the nature of committees and meetings, and lines of communication. The underdeveloped data management systems have been overhauled. Representatives of the partnership are now involved more fully in partnership-wide planning, review and development. Closer attention is now being given to identifying strengths and weaknesses in provision leading to targeted professional development and the better use of cross-partnership expertise. There is a growing data-based awareness of where intervention is needed. Senior managers in a number of key partner colleges have contributed strongly to such developments. The action plan response to the first phase of the inspection is pertinent and beginning to effect change. However, these changes are at an early stage of development and have yet to impact sufficiently on the quality of trainees' experiences or their rate of progress.

## Appendix list of colleges

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

Bicton College  
City of Bristol College  
Cornwall College  
East Devon College  
North Devon College  
Plymouth City College  
Somerset College of Arts and technology  
Truro College