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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. It was conducted in two phases by two of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI), supported by specialist Additional Inspectors. Inspectors evaluated full- time pre-service and part-time in-service provision at the university. They also inspected an in-service course, validated by the University of Brighton, offered at one of the university's partner colleges. They focused on the quality of training and management and quality assurance procedures during the first phase, which took place in February 2007. During the second phase, inspectors concentrated on evaluating 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 of Brighton offers a full-time pre-service post-graduate certificate in education (PGCE), based at the university, to around 16 trainees. A high proportion of these trainees specialises in arts subjects. It also offers a part-time in-service certificate in education (Cert Ed) and a part-time in-service PGCE for those trainees who have a degree. The part-time programmes are run at the university and at four colleges of further education, enrolling approximately 130 trainees in total. The colleges have responsibility for delivery and resources while the university retains overall responsibility for quality assurance and academic standards. The programmes are endorsed qualifications and satisfy the Secretary of State's requirements for FE teachers.

Effectiveness of provision

4. The overall quality of provision is very good (grade 1). The different aspects of the programmes blend together particularly well to ensure that trainees focus throughout their course on improving their teaching skills. Sensitive to the needs and aspirations of their students, trainees plan their lessons very well and teach confidently. Whether they are new to the profession or already have teaching experience, trainees reflect thoughtfully on their practice, drawing very effectively on what they learn on their course and on constructive feedback from tutors and mentors. They benefit from a high standard of training that includes good mentoring, although opportunities to share best practice across the partnership could be further extended. In this small, cohesive partnership, tutors know their trainees well and provide them with excellent individual support. Well-led, with comprehensive systems in place to review and improve provision, the

partnership is highly successful in training teachers for the lifelong learning sector.

Key strengths

Inspectors identified the following strengths:

- very good use by trainees of theory, reflection and feedback to improve their practical teaching skills
- the good progress made by trainees
- trainees' thorough lesson planning and confident classroom management
- the high standard of training by teacher trainers
- good workplace mentoring
- thorough assessment, with very good feedback on lesson observations by tutors and mentors
- excellent individual support
- very productive partnership working
- rigorous recruitment, selection and induction of trainees
- meticulously managed programmes
- comprehensive and effective procedures for assuring the quality of the training

Area for attention

The partnership should address:

- greater exploitation of partnership resources to enable trainees, mentors and tutors to share best practice

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

Achievement of trainees

5. Both pre-service and in-service trainees make good progress, regardless of their prior knowledge and experience. Trainees demonstrate a highly professional approach to their teaching and make a very positive contribution to their workplace or placement. They want their own students to succeed and they set them high standards. In doing so, they are sensitive to the backgrounds and experiences of their students. Through their planning, language, resources and attitudes, trainees demonstrate a good understanding of equality and diversity issues.

6. The progress trainees make is clearly linked to the thoughtful way in which they evaluate their teaching and reflect on links between theory and practice. They use self-evaluation, as well as feedback from mentors and

tutors, very effectively to identify areas for development in order to improve their practical teaching skills.

7. Trainees start the course with a very good command of their subject or vocational area. Most of those studying part-time already have teaching experience. As the course progresses, both pre- and in-service trainees make good progress in developing further their knowledge and skills in relation to the teaching of their specialism.

8. Lesson planning is thorough. In-service trainees can identify how their planning skills have been sharpened considerably since starting the programme, even if they have been teaching for many years. Trainees successfully link lesson plans to schemes of work and address the varying needs and abilities of their students when planning a lesson.

9. Trainees understand the importance of helping their students to develop their literacy, numeracy and language skills and this is reflected in their planning. Following a recent drive from university tutors to focus on numeracy, many trainees updated their own mathematical skills and discovered ways to incorporate these into the teaching of their subject or vocational area. This prompted one art trainee, for example, to involve his students in a numeracy task relating to perspective.

10. Trainees demonstrate confidence in using a wide range of teaching and learning methods. They manage their classes well, maintain momentum and keep students motivated, whilst ensuring that students acquire the necessary knowledge, skills and understanding. They use questioning as a tool to good effect to ensure that all students are involved, as well as a way to check understanding. Trainees improve their skills in the use of information and communication technology (ICT) and become more confident in their understanding of how technology can help their students to learn. However, for a minority of trainees, there is insufficient opportunity at their workplace to practise these skills.

11. Assessment practice is good. Trainees use a wide range of assessment methods effectively. They check understanding well in lessons and they monitor their students' progress effectively, often keeping detailed notes. At their workplace or placement, trainees gain good experience of using examination and coursework assessment criteria.

12. Trainees are particularly good at working with students in class on a one-to-one basis, giving individual feedback, encouraging learners and recognising achievement. Trainees provide their students with very good academic and pastoral support and know when they need to refer students to specialists. They are knowledgeable about additional services available at their workplace or placement.

Quality of training

13. The Cert Ed/PGCE programme is well-designed, professionally delivered and meets national qualification requirements. Catering for trainees from different backgrounds, it provides them with the knowledge and skills they need to teach with confidence in the lifelong learning sector.

14. The course successfully addresses the requirement for trainees to have a minimum core of understanding and skills in relation to literacy, numeracy and language. University tutors have begun to share good practice in relation to teaching and assessing numeracy across the partnership.

15. The quality of training at the university and across the partnership is high. Trainees benefit from small, cohesive teams of teacher trainers, who are good practitioners and who keep themselves up-to-date on relevant, national developments. Teacher trainers and trainees skilfully debate learning theories and policy issues in a way that enables trainees to reflect on how it applies to their own teaching as well as to the wider political context. Understanding the background to the 'Every Child Matters' (ECM) agenda, for example, enabled trainees at one workplace to successfully map their schemes of work and lesson plans against ECM themes.

16. The quality of mentoring is good. Placements for the pre-service programme, primarily in further education colleges, are carefully selected to ensure that trainees have good subject-specialist mentors. Trainees on the part-time course, who teach in a variety of settings, gain their practical experience at their normal workplace and an appropriate mentor is identified. Mentors provide trainees with good subject-specific advice and guidance. Mentoring for pre-service trainees specialising in art is particularly strong. Most trainees benefit from working in teams with qualified and experienced teachers. However, the courses do not systematically provide all trainees with opportunities to observe best practice in their specialism.

17. The workplace experience provides almost all trainees with a good range of teaching and assessment opportunities. A small minority of pre-service trainees focus almost exclusively on teaching on advanced courses, such as GCE A level, AS level and BTEC National Diploma. Whilst this provides them with valuable in-depth knowledge and experience of different courses at this level, they do not have sufficient exposure to teaching at lower levels.

18. Assessment is thorough. A particular strength of the partnership is the clear and constructive feedback given to trainees by both tutors and mentors following lesson observations. Mentors and tutors work well together in this respect, linking their comments to those made by other observers. The feedback acknowledges what went well and, even when sessions are very good, identifies specific areas for improvement. In the best practice, comments also helpfully link the feedback to relevant learning theories or policy issues.

19. On both pre-service and in-service courses, teacher trainers are very responsive to individual trainees' needs. Trainees value highly this excellent support. Trainees' prior experiences and relevant knowledge are taken into account, with all trainees completing a self-assessment when they start their programme. Identified strengths and areas for development, in relation to teaching standards, ICT, literacy, numeracy and language, form the basis of trainees' individual learning plans (ILPs). Revised this year in the light of research and feedback from last year, ILPs are used effectively to record and monitor trainees' progress against agreed targets.

20. Partner colleges provide appropriate literacy and numeracy support for part-time trainees. At the university, such support is rarely required for the pre-service trainees who are selected and, at interview, are required to undertake a presentation and write a brief essay. Students with dyslexia receive good, specialist support. Some trainees benefit from university procedures that enable them to progress directly into the second year of the in-service programmes if they have appropriate prior qualifications and/or experience.

Management and quality assurance of provision

21. Partners work very well together in this small and supportive partnership. Whilst appropriate formal structures are in place to ensure regular communication, a key strength of the partnership is the way in which the university course leader and college colleagues maintain informal contact on a regular basis.

22. The programmes are very well managed at each location and overall management by the university is meticulous. On strategic issues, there is a clear ethos of team working with representatives from each college actively involved in the planning, delivery and evaluation of the programmes. To respond to recent and impending national initiatives in the lifelong learning sector, the team has worked very effectively to devise a new programme for next year. Roles and responsibilities are clearly defined and understood.

23. Resources are good and deployed appropriately across the partnership. Teacher trainers at the university use interactive whiteboards but have yet to deploy them in an innovative way to model best practice. The university's virtual learning environment (VLE) is being developed to encourage trainees with the same specialism to communicate with each other. Trainees find the VLE very useful for accessing resources, such as articles and schemes of work. There is potential for greater exploitation of partnership and university resources, such as the VLE, to enable trainees, tutors and mentors to keep in touch, particularly in relation to their subject specialism.

24. Quality assurance at the university and across the partnership is rigorous. The key vehicle for formally evaluating the provision is the

university's annual 'academic health report'. This is used effectively to analyse the provision, to review actions taken following the previous report and to identify areas for development for the next year. The report draws on a range of evidence and includes data on achievement and progression, analysed by age, gender, disability and ethnicity. In addition, a course board and management group, with representation by teachers, mentors and trainees, meets to review provision. The team is very responsive to formal and informal feedback from trainees, mentors and tutors within the partnership, as well as from inspectors and the external examiner.

25. The moderation process includes not just trainees' written work but also lesson observations. Although limited to a sample across the partnership, the system of double observations, whereby university tutors accompany mentors, is effective in encouraging consistency of feedback and it enables university tutors and mentors to get to know each other.

26. Support and training for mentors is very good. The course leader at the university is in regular touch with mentors and they value highly this personal contact. All mentors are given helpful packs outlining their role and many attend formal training sessions. Systems are in place to ensure that those who do not attend the training sessions are sent materials and are supported through regular telephone and email contact. The content and nature of the support given to mentors is regularly reviewed to meet the changing needs of the course and of the trainees. In practice, course tutors know mentors well and are quick to respond to any queries or concerns.

27. Recruitment, selection and induction systems are thorough. Each college in the partnership is responsible for the recruitment of trainees to the courses it delivers. Admissions processes are discussed at course team meetings to ensure consistency. Selection is particularly rigorous for the pre-service trainees, who undertake a presentation to assess their communication skills.

28. Despite attempts to increase recruitment from groups traditionally under-represented in further education, the percentage of trainees from minority ethnic backgrounds has been low. However, in line with university-wide policy, the course team has taken on board a set of 'equality commitments', one of which specifically relates to recruitment and admissions. The team is on track to meet its increased target for next year.

Appendix list of colleges

The following colleges were members of the HEI Partnership at the time of the inspection;

- City College Brighton and Hove
- Hastings College of Arts and Technology
- Northbrook College
- Sussex Downs College