

University of Cumbria

University of Cumbria
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A primary initial teacher training
inspection report
2007/08

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Introduction

The University of Cumbria (formerly St Martin's College) works in partnership with 1600 schools to provide primary initial teacher training (ITT) courses. It offers four-year and three-year BA Honours degrees with QTS. Both undergraduate programmes prepare trainees to teach children from 3 to 11 years. Trainees also select subject studies and have the opportunity to take advanced study in the early years of education. The university also offers full time and flexible modular post graduate programmes for those who wish to train to teach children 5 to 11 years. Those selecting the full time post graduate programme can opt for a French specialism. The university has four campuses, Lancaster, Ambleside, Carlisle and Tower Hamlets, London. At the time of the inspection there were 622 trainees on post graduate programmes and 1488 on undergraduate programmes.

Context

The inspection was carried out by a team of inspectors in accordance with the *Ofsted Handbook for the Inspection of Initial Teacher Training (2005-2011)*.

This revised report combines the judgements from a short inspection of the provision and of the management and quality assurance arrangements in 2007/08, with the judgements from the scrutiny of further evidence submitted to Ofsted in February 2008.

Grades are awarded in accordance with the following scale

Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Satisfactory
Grade 4	Inadequate

Main inspection judgements

Quality of training: Grade 1

Management and quality assurance: Grade: 1

Key strengths

- the effective selection and retention of trainees
- the high quality and consistency of training across the campuses and programmes
- the very good support for individual trainees arising from effective collaboration between different services within the university and partnership
- the highly successful use of the online virtual learning environment to support and inform trainees and trainers
- the strong partnership
- the effective management of school placements.

Points for consideration

- ensuring that planning for improvement is related to clear outcomes for trainees.

The quality of training

1. The overall quality of the training is very good. Centre based training is of high quality. The structure and content of the undergraduate and postgraduate programmes meet the Requirements and enable trainees to meet the Standards.
2. All programmes are well designed with education studies at the core and clear links to curriculum and subject studies. The programmes are progressively challenging and, through a balanced mix of taught modules and practical experience in a range of school contexts, develop effectively trainees' skills as reflective practitioners. Carefully planned common modules and close agreement about how they are to be taught ensure a high level of quality and consistency across the campuses and programmes.
3. Modules are highly relevant to trainees' needs. They are referenced to the new Standards and their content reflects current national priorities and initiatives, including the renewed framework for literacy, the Rose report recommendations on early reading, assessment for learning, creativity and inclusion. The elective modules on the undergraduate programmes allow trainees to specialise and develop personal interests such as special educational needs. All programmes refer to the Foundation Stage and those trainees that opt for advanced studies in early years are familiar with national curricular guidance and the Foundation Stage profile. All trainees gain a good understanding of the curriculum for information and communication technology (ICT) in the primary school and also how to use ICT as a teaching tool.
4. Centre based training is coherent and linked well to school based training through assignments and school based tasks. These tasks draw on and extend the content of taught sessions. They also enable trainees to put theory into practice and to appreciate the links between education and curriculum studies.
5. University tutors are well qualified and use their varied research and subject interests to support their teaching. The faculty team approach ensures a strong culture of continuous improvement, quick revisions to content in response to trainees' comments, and a high degree of consistency of training across the programmes and campuses. Trainees' evaluations of sessions and modules are very positive. Very effective use is made of the on-line virtual learning environment to facilitate trainees' learning and contact with tutors, to give parity of access to trainees on all four campuses and to enable distance learning especially for those taking the flexible modular programme.
6. School based training is structured well to allow trainees time to observe class teachers and subject specialists, and to work with groups of pupils before planning lessons for whole classes. Trainees' files show that they receive good support and advice from class teachers and associate tutors. Documentation for schools is clear; schools appreciate the details of what they are expected to do. The Red Book sets out unequivocal guidance for trainees and trainers on how to assess different levels of competence and trainees' progress in relation to the Standards. It also provides clear details of what counts as a good lesson in different subjects. Tutors' written

evaluations of lessons, however, do not always focus on how well the subject was taught.

7. The overall support for trainees is very good, and trainers have an in depth understanding of trainees' performance on different routes and in different locations. There are good procedures to audit and improve trainees' subject knowledge as well as their study and literacy skills. Strong links between university services and the partnership enable the university to make bespoke arrangements to support school placements and to meet individual needs very well. The marking of trainees' assignments against agreed criteria is thorough and constructive. A strengthening feature is the focus on close tutoring to enable trainees to excel academically; a good step is the introduction in educational studies of peer assessment and the setting of targets. Personal and academic tutors meet regularly with trainees to discuss their progress in meeting the Standards. Many trainees compile a detailed professional and academic development record which later forms the basis for their career entry and development profile.

Management and quality assurance

8. The overall outstanding quality of management and quality assurance has been sustained. The involvement of staff in bringing about university status has not deflected from the work to ensure high quality training and improvements to the overall provision.

9. Procedures to recruit, select and retain trainees are very good. The prospectus and new web site give clear details of the individuality of each campus, the programmes available and entry requirements. The East London based programmes recruit well from the local area and from further afield, including Ireland. Overall recruitment from black and minority ethnic groups is strong. The flexible modular post graduate programme continues to provide a way into teaching for mature trainees who otherwise would not be able to study. The focus at interview on personal qualities and experience, together with the opportunity for those without required qualifications to take equivalence tests, results in the university offering places to trainees often rejected by other providers. Records show that these trainees, and those who bridge into the three year degree from the foundation degree, usually do as well as, and in some cases, better than those who enter with good academic qualifications.

10. The selection process is rigorous and well tailored to reflect the different programmes. There is detailed guidance for prospective trainees and for the tutors, headteachers and associate tutors from the partnership, who hold group and individual interviews. Trainees value the personal touch and the opportunity to visit the campus where their chosen programme is taught. Candidates with disabilities and special needs, including dyslexia, receive good support through the involvement of the Student Development and Advisory Service. The strong focus on 'fitness to teach' leads to the early identification of training and placement needs with information passed to year group leaders and support services. Unsuccessful

candidates receive a clear indication of why they did not meet the criteria. Those offered a place are sent comprehensive information on the programme, pre-course reading and tasks. The effectiveness of the selection process and the training is reflected in the high retention rate and good outcomes for trainees.

11. A key strength of the provision is the effective logistical management of placements in more than 1600 schools where there are over 2,700 trained associate tutors who oversee school based training. The number of schools in the partnership has increased since the last inspection reflecting the university's successful steps to provide a widening range of contexts and to meet the needs of trainees who live some distance away, especially those on the modular postgraduate programme. A small number of schools have been appropriately de-selected when they failed to meet the criteria in the partnership agreement. The very good contact between schools and the university through the partnership office, and an often long-standing relationship with link tutors, ensures that issues over placements are quickly resolved. The university is equally prompt to support schools when concerns emerge about a trainee's professional competence.

12. The partnership is evolving aptly to meet changing programme needs and in response to feedback from schools. Documentation has been revised, slimmed and placed on the web site, and the programme of mentor training, briefing sessions and partnership events has been expanded to include twilight sessions and additional venues, including the Isle of Man and Northumberland. In keeping with national changes, the partnership is looking at ways to support continued professional development. The university has successfully assisted schools in bidding for funded projects and shared the outcomes within the partnership. A good example is the work of the Eden Valley schools with trainees to develop assessment in mathematics.

13. The recent creation of campus partnership liaison tutors and coordinating link tutors has strengthened the management of the partnership and increased the capacity to quality assure school based training. Link tutors' effective work to moderate the assessment of trainees is a key aspect of the quality assurance procedures and much valued by schools. Schools meet well their responsibilities and some associate tutors have extended their role to coaching trainees and providing useful training sessions to support classroom practice.

14. Centre based training is well led and managed. Strong programme and subject teams share a common drive to provide the best and to keep the content of programmes up-to-date through academic research and liaison with regional and national bodies. Effective procedures to quality assure trainees' progress include moderation across campuses and the comparison of outcomes from different tutorial groups. External examiners confirm that assessment procedures are rigorous, meet university requirements and academic standards are comparable with those in other institutions.

15. The current trial of a rolling action plan rather than an end-of-year evaluation is a valuable step in linking improvement planning to issues as they arise. The

annual evaluation reports are comprehensive documents which flag up concerns at university and department level. While they include benchmarking data and a very thorough analysis of outcomes for trainees, it is not always explicit how the proposed actions, particularly in the partnership plan, arise from the analysis or how they will have an impact on the quality of provision and trainees' performance.