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A secondary initial teacher training
short inspection report
2007/08

Managing inspector
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Introduction

The University of Newcastle upon Tyne works in partnership with 80 schools to provide secondary initial teacher training (ITT) courses. It offers courses in English with drama, mathematics, science, history, geography, religious education and modern languages. At the time of the inspection there were 152 trainees.

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 report draws on evidence from a short inspection of the provision and an inspection of the management and quality assurance arrangements.

Grades are awarded in accordance with the following scale

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

Main inspection judgements

Management and quality assurance: Grade: 2

The overall quality of training is at least good.

The next inspection of this provider will take place in accordance with the Initial Teacher Education Inspection Framework.

Key strengths

- the rigorous and demanding selection procedures, which result in the recruitment of very able and highly committed trainees
- the very well established and stable partnership with schools
- the effective communication between schools and the university
- the strong emphasis on individual reflection and evaluation, which is effective in helping trainees to improve their practice.

Points for action

- developing and refining systems for assuring the quality of school-based training.

Points for consideration

- developing greater coherence between whole-course action planning and that at subject level.

The quality of training

1. Course content is well designed and provides a comprehensive programme of study for trainees. It has been revised in order to include reference to recent developments; for example, personalised learning, issues emerging from the *Every Child Matters* agenda, the revised National Curriculum requirements and assessment for learning. Developments in 14-19 education, including the new diploma courses, are also included. There are secure links between subject specific and generic work, thus ensuring a coherent training programme. Assignments are relevant and support the training well.

2. The university provides clear guidance to schools on essential and desirable elements to be included in the programme of school-based generic studies. This allows professional mentors to have some degree of flexibility in planning a programme of generic training sessions that complements university-based work, and this is appreciated by school-based trainers. Although this arrangement has not yet been extended to school-based subject training programmes, plans to do so are welcomed by many subject mentors.

3. The university draws on its partnership with a variety of schools and colleges, including middle schools, 13-18 schools, 11-18 schools and post-16 institutions in order to ensure that trainees gain experience of working across the full 11-18 age range. Many trainees report that they benefit from the opportunity to work in a variety of contexts, as this develops their understanding of how schools catering for different age ranges may differ in operation.

4. The structure of the course effectively supports trainees' progress towards meeting the Standards. A short diagnostic placement highlights priorities for development in trainees' practice, whilst the long 13-week placement allows them to consolidate their learning, with particular attention to addressing individual needs. A strong feature of course structure is the enhancement phase at the end of the course; this provides trainees with the opportunity to consolidate and further extend their pedagogical knowledge.

5. University-based training is evaluated positively by trainees, who are appreciative of the variety of sessions led by university staff and external trainers. Trainers model good practice effectively, and trainees are motivated and enthused by many sessions at the university. The emphasis on reflection combined with careful consideration of educational research helps trainees to become skilled in exploring a wide range of current issues. The small team of tutors works effectively together to combine their expertise in the development of the generic studies component of the university based training.

6. The university provides guidance to mentors on their roles and responsibilities, and the majority carry these out effectively. Trainees are observed regularly and subject mentors hold weekly meetings with their trainees in order to review progress. Almost all trainees value the support provided by their mentors. Nevertheless, there is significant variability in the quality of mentoring within the

partnership. A minority of mentors are not sufficiently aware of their roles, and this is reflected in the quality of their feedback to trainees and records of weekly meetings. Targets set are not always sufficiently precise, and not all new mentors have been trained in key mentoring skills such as lesson observation.

7. A strength of the provision is the emphasis on reflection and self-evaluation, which results in trainees being fully aware of their strengths and areas for development. In turn, this enables tutors and mentors to plan training that effectively meets trainees' individual needs. Good quality tailored academic support is provided for trainees who need it, and many feel that their writing skills have developed well as a result of this support. Although pre-course tasks are not personalised, their use does encourage trainees to reflect on their own strengths and areas for development before starting the formal training programme. The information provided to schools prior to the trainees' arrival is not always detailed enough to enable school-based trainers to plan an individualised training programme. However, pre-placement meetings at the university allow mentors and trainees to discuss areas of strength as well as individual needs, and this opportunity is very much appreciated by all of those involved.

8. There is a clear structure for recording the progress of students towards the standards. This is evidenced through the training journal, weekly mentor records and evidence recording grids. The quality of trainees' reflective journals is good overall, and some examples are outstanding. Most trainees take the reflective journal very seriously, and as such it provides a good record of the progress they are making and of their thinking about teaching and learning. Tutors meet with trainees regularly to establish an accurate view of the progress individuals are making.

Management and quality assurance

9. The university produces detailed and informative materials on the courses, including good quality web-based materials. There are examples of particularly useful pre-course guidance produced for candidates by subject tutors, such as the comprehensive and helpful material provided for religious education applicants. Although minimum requirements for all courses are set out clearly, the university is keen to consider individual cases; for example, mathematics candidates who may have qualifications in other subject areas might be guided to follow a subject knowledge enhancement programme. Foreign nationals applying to train as modern languages teachers are also given specialised guidance and support.

10. The very effective selection procedures are rigorous and demanding. These successfully test prospective trainees' skills in group work, as well as an individual presentation task and interview. Trainees are made fully aware of the commitment required in order to complete the course, and in particular the demands of working consistently at postgraduate level. The thorough selection process leads to the recruitment of very able trainees. All candidates are given detailed and thorough feedback on their performance at interview. Unsuccessful candidates are given very

clear and specific guidance on addressing weaknesses, and are positively encouraged to re-apply in the future.

11. The partnership is very well established, and this is a key strength of the provision. Many schools have been in partnership with the university for a considerable length of time. University staff and school-based staff demonstrate very high levels of commitment to working in partnership. School-based trainers feel that they are fully involved in course development; they comment that they feel valued by the university, and that they appreciate the friendly and personal approach taken by university staff in working collaboratively.

12. The partnership agreement is clearly laid out, and outlines the roles and responsibilities of all those involved in the training. Partnership development meetings involve a range of stakeholders, with outcomes then being taken forward for discussion by the partnership committee. Much consideration is given to the issues raised by school-based trainers, and modifications are made to arrangements as a result; for example, the suggestion to move mentor meetings at the university to twilight sessions has been successful, and as a result attendance at these meetings has improved.

13. There is some particularly effective work carried out by cluster groups of partnership schools, enabling school-based trainers to share best practice. In a few schools, mentors benefit greatly from working with each other, across subjects. As well as providing an opportunity for mentors to share ideas for effective training, this enables them to develop greater consistency in their assessments of trainees.

14. Communication between the university and schools is a significant strength. School-based trainers are able to maintain a regular dialogue with university staff. There is increasing use of web-based materials by school-based trainers; online resources are readily available, and the website is easy to navigate. Training sessions at the university are generally well attended. Mentors very much value the opportunity to discuss their ideas within a subject forum. The agenda typically relates to a range of current subject-related issues from the wider world of teaching, as well as procedural matters.

15. The university's procedures for monitoring its policies on equal opportunities and race relations are thorough. The views of trainees on these matters are regularly sought, and information gathered is used well in planning actions to address issues that may arise.

16. Although roles and responsibilities are clearly defined in documentation, systems for assuring the quality of mentoring are not fully established. Not all professional mentors are aware of their role in monitoring the quality of subject mentoring within schools, and the university's procedures for gathering information on the quality of mentoring are underdeveloped. As a consequence, a minority of mentors are not well equipped to carry out their roles to a high standard. The university relies heavily on feedback from trainees on the quality of mentoring at the

end of placements, but this does not consistently and reliably indicate early problems that may exist.

17. The assessment of trainees is monitored on a regular basis. Joint observations between university staff and school-based trainers are now a regular feature, and are useful in developing consistency across schools. There are secure plans to carry out cross-subject moderation in the latter part of the year, with the intention of establishing greater accuracy and rigour in the assessment of trainees' work. Work with other local providers is also valuable in gaining an overview of the quality of trainees' work.

18. The university gathers a wide range of evaluative information, particularly from trainees, who are consulted regularly on a variety of issues. The staff/student committee is particularly effective in reviewing specific aspects of the provision. School-based trainers are invited to give feedback on their experience in working on the course, and university staff have a good level of awareness of these views.

19. Whole course action planning is well presented and shows clear success criteria. It reflects the commitment to course development shared by the tutor team. Action planning at subject level is clear and concise, showing that subject leaders are aware of development priorities within their own areas. However, there is limited evidence of coherence between action planning at whole course level and that at subject level.