

University of Chester

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A secondary initial teacher training
short inspection report
2007/08

Managing inspector
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Introduction

The University of Chester works in partnership with approximately 90 schools to provide secondary initial teacher training (ITT) courses. It offers postgraduate certificate of education (PGCE) courses for the 11-16 age range in art, drama, mathematics, modern foreign languages, physical education, religious education (RE) and science. At the time of the inspection there were 135 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 planning of the course elements which ensures that trainees are able to meet the Standards
- the quality of the subject training and the modelling of good practice in subject sessions which provides trainees with good role models
- the well developed strategies which are in place to ensure that the individual needs of trainees are identified and supported
- the rigorous selection procedures which ensure the suitability of the trainees recruited
- the development of the partnership and in particular the support procedures and documentation provided to assist school partners in their support of trainees
- the strength of the assessment and moderation procedures which ensure the accuracy and rigour in the assessment of trainees against the Standards.

Points for action

- reviewing the structure and delivery of the university-based professional studies course to improve its impact and to make the links to subject and school-based studies more explicit
- improving the quality of subject reviews and action planning so that it is more focused on outcomes.

Points for consideration

- reviewing the nature of the course assignments to consistently provide a more specific link to trainees' progress in meeting the Standards
- considering how best to develop a consistent quality assurance role among professional mentors.

The quality of training

1. The structure and content of the training programme are well planned to enable trainees to meet the Standards. The programme is up to date including appropriate coverage of recent national developments; for example, personalised learning, the focus on inclusion from the agenda of *Every Child Matters* and developments in the National Curriculum, and in the case of religious education (RE), the non-statutory national framework for RE. There is a good programme of subject enhancement including a focused week which allows trainees to develop their subject expertise. This provides valuable international experience for trainees in some subjects.
2. A key feature of the course is an emphasis on trainees developing the skills of reflective practitioners through writing a weekly journal. At its most effective, for example in the drama course, this provides a valuable tool for trainees to embed their learning and develop a personal philosophy of education. However, the contribution of this work is not fully extended for trainees in all subjects. A range of assignments also contribute to trainees' learning, but the considerable flexibility in the choice of topic for subject based assignments results in a minority of trainees not selecting their assignments effectively to support their progress towards the Standards.
3. The elements of the course provide a coherent range of experiences which ensure that by its end trainees have a good understanding of the contribution of general professional and subject based studies to their use of theory and practice in teaching. However, in the early stages of the course the links between the different programme components are not sufficiently overt so that it takes some time for trainees to fully understand the relevance of the professional studies course to their training.
4. University subject training is good: trainers and external speakers take great care to model good practice. Sessions are interesting and trainees are enthused and motivated by the work. There is a good blend of theory and practice. This is not always the case in the general professional studies course where some components are overly didactic. School-based professional studies are usually of good quality and build well on university-based studies.
5. Individual trainee needs are met very effectively and trainees say that they are extremely well supported by tutors and school based mentors. Before the start of the course trainees are provided with tasks, subject enhancement courses and experiences to complete. These ensure that trainees are well placed to make the most of the course from its initial stages. Trainees are well supported in developing and following individual training plans throughout the course and there is a strong emphasis on the development of subject knowledge. Mentors are well briefed and their contribution to the development of trainees is generally good. Placements are carefully matched to the needs of trainees. Trainees who face particular difficulties, including those with a physical disability, are extremely well supported.

6. The processes for monitoring, reviewing and assessing the trainees against the Standards are rigorous. The lesson observation forms and records of meetings with the mentor are used well to record progress and set targets for improvement. These inform the Standards profile log that trainees compile to illustrate their achievements.

Management and quality assurance

7. There are rigorous arrangements for the selection of trainees which result in good outcomes in terms of the quality of the trainees recruited. Consistent across all the subjects and fully documented, the interviews provide a wide range of selection evidence which is effectively used.

8. The university's inclusive aims are clearly stated in the equal opportunities and race equality policy. This, and the related strategic action plan, usefully underpin other policies, including the partnership agreement, and are included within mentor training. The proportion of trainees recruited from minority ethnic groups has fluctuated considerably and is currently below the target set by the Training and Development Agency. Since the last inspection the university has appointed a co-ordinator for minority ethnic recruitment to lead the promotion of this. Recent initiatives include a publicity film, targeted mailshots and advertisements in appropriate regional newspapers. However, it is too early to measure the impact of these initiatives on recruitment.

9. The overall management and strategic leadership of the programme and the partnership is good with clear structures and effective communication at all levels. The management has worked hard to accomplish a range of staffing, procedural and academic changes, including the modularisation of the programme and the introduction of M-levels. Resourcing is good and has strengthened since the last inspection. The joint secondary PGCE programme leaders and course tutors have a very good understanding of the details of the course. All tutors are well qualified and several have very substantial experience of teacher training. New tutors are very well supported in their induction. The sharing of good practice across subjects has developed since the last inspection but variations in the quality of provision show that there is scope for this to be extended.

10. Systems for securing the commitment to and participation in the partnership are good. The partnership manager is well informed about practice across the partnership and is strong in his engagement with schools. Schools have a clear understanding of the partnership and are actively involved in programme review and development. The summer convening of a conference of professional mentors to write and agree grade descriptors for the new Standards is a notable example. Documentation is clear and succinct and there are good communication systems. University tutors act very promptly to support mentors.

11. School-based mentors generally fulfil their roles and responsibilities well. Training for new mentors is good and well managed. However, the partnership is

diligent in supporting mentors by providing individual training in schools. Increasingly subject tutors help mentors to develop their observation and feedback skills through joint observations. The developing on-line system has good potential to improve mentors' access to training materials and gives partnership managers additional opportunities to monitor the extent of training undertaken.

12. The partnership uses a satisfactory range of procedures for monitoring the quality of the provision in schools. These have been strengthened since the last inspection by new appointments and arrangements and by providing schools with some commentary on their performance. Subject tutors complete school visit records and this provides some evidence on the support that is provided.

13. A monitoring and support feature now into its third year is the annual visits of the link tutors to schools. At these visits elements of provision are assessed and action points agreed with the professional mentor. This system is greatly welcomed by schools as a means of support and of validation of good practice. It provides the university with an annual health check. However, the reporting relates principally to procedural matters and checking that trainees' entitlements are met, and does not yet generally extend to judgements/feedback from first-hand observation on the quality of the provision. As a result of a small scale pilot, some professional mentors have been encouraged to adopt a quality assurance role. The outcomes of this pilot will inform the future role of professional mentors and identify relevant training requirements.

14. Since the last inspection the university has strengthened its external examining arrangements by the appointment of examiners in all subjects. However, the university's framework and guidance for external examiners is insufficiently clear in outlining what is required. As a consequence the reports vary in quality, and hence their usefulness and do not always provide a more critical view on the strengths and weaknesses of the provision.

15. The faculty follows well-defined review and development systems set by the university. It gathers the views of trainees and school based staff in several ways. Regular meetings of professional and subject mentors and an annual course review day provide good opportunities for the exchange of views and for a critical examination of procedures. The adoption of self-assessment documents has provided an impressive amount of staff self-reflection: the documents are extensive in course detail although some lack a critical edge. University systems for annual review and monitoring incorporate good responses to comments from external examiners and trainees and draws upon external benchmarking. Nevertheless the model used tends to focus on the response to external scrutiny at a whole programme level. The consequence is that the partnership is not always sufficiently self-critical in identifying points for improvement in subjects nor is action planning sufficiently focused on identifying outcomes for trainees.

16. Moderation procedures are secure and ensure consistency, accuracy and rigour in the assessment of trainees against the standards. Grade descriptors for each of the standards have been developed and promulgated. Professional mentors

moderate judgements across subjects in school effectively and the course tutors moderate across schools within subjects to ensure consistency. At the end of the first placement the partnership manager sees a range of trainees teaching across a range of subjects. Decisions about trainees' standards involve discussions between tutors, mentors and usually the trainee, and are clearly based on a good range of evidence. Arrangements for the external moderation of the assessment of trainees remain very good.