

Bath Spa University

Bath Spa University
Newton Park
Newton St Loe
Bath
BA2 9BN

A further education teacher training
inspection report
2007/08

Managing inspector
Kathleen Tyler HMI

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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 part-time in-service provision validated by Bath Spa University, offered at two of the university's partner colleges. They focused on the quality of training and management and quality assurance during the first phase, which took place in November 2007. During the second phase, inspectors concentrated on evaluating the achievements of trainees through observing their teaching and gathering evidence on their progress during the teacher training programmes. They also evaluated the impact of any improvements made in the provision since phase one. Phase two was completed in June 2008.

Background

3. Bath Spa University offers a part-time in-service Certificate in Education (Cert Ed) and a part-time, in-service, Post Graduate Certificate in Education (PGCE). The programmes are delivered by the university at one of the partner colleges of further education for 2007-2008 only, and by four other partner colleges, with 165 trainees in total. These four colleges have responsibility for the delivery of the training, resources and their own quality assurance, while the university retains overall responsibility for quality improvement and academic standards. The programmes have been endorsed by Standards Verification UK (SVUK).

Effectiveness of provision

4. The overall quality of provision is very good (grade 1). Trainees make very good progress, have high levels of specialist subject expertise and make very good use of self-reflection and feedback to improve their teaching skills and professional practice. They use a wide range of teaching methods and learning resources to good effect in their lessons. The teacher training programmes are very well designed, with very good links between the taught programmes and the trainees' workplace contexts. Trainees receive highly effective personal and subject specialist support and they develop very good expertise in teaching their specialist area. Most, but not all, trainees currently experience a sufficiently wide range of teaching at different levels. Assessment is rigorous, consistent and accurate. Leadership and management of the provision are very good. Partnership working is very effective. The comprehensive and highly effective culture of continuous quality improvement significantly enhances the trainees' experience. The partnership is making good

progress in the promotion of equality of opportunity, but has further work to do in relation to trainees' understanding of some aspects of ethnic and cultural diversity.

Key strengths

Inspectors identified the following strengths:

- very good progress made by trainees
- high levels of specialist subject expertise
- very good use by trainees of reflective practice and feedback from teacher trainers and mentors to improve their teaching skills
- very effective use by trainees of a wide range of teaching and learning strategies and learning resources
- extremely well designed programmes, with very good links between the taught programmes and trainees' workplace teaching and learning contexts
- highly effective personal and specialist subject support for trainees
- rigorous, consistent and accurate assessment
- very good leadership and management
- very effective partnership working
- comprehensive and highly effective quality improvement.

Areas for attention

The partnership should address:

- the limited range of teaching experience for a few trainees
- trainees' underdeveloped understanding of some aspects of cultural and ethnic diversity.

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

Achievements of trainees

5. Trainees make very good progress. They are highly motivated and enthusiastic practitioners, who work hard to develop their teaching skills and professional practice. Typically, they are very receptive to new ideas and approaches to securing improvements in their skills. They speak enthusiastically about the significant progress they have made; for example in lesson planning, class management, engaging their own learners in learning and in the constructive use of assessment. They are skilful in relating theoretical concepts, in useful and practical ways, to their own teaching and learning settings.

6. Because of the very strong emphasis placed on the trainees' role as reflective practitioners, many become adept in carrying out detailed and accurate self-evaluations of their lessons and of their professional development. Consequently, they are able to make informed changes to future planning which supports effective implementation of their work with individuals and groups. The close attention trainees pay to feedback on their assignments and observations of teaching and learning by tutors, mentors and peers, makes further contribution to the very good progress that trainees make in improving their skills.

7. Trainees demonstrate high levels of expertise in their specialist subject areas and are well qualified for the teaching they undertake. Very helpful support from mentors in the workplace secures the development of a wide range of specialist subject pedagogy. Trainees work well in teams.

8. Very effective use of a wide range of teaching and learning strategies and well considered learning resources ensure that trainees keep their students on task and that they make good progress. Lessons are well planned and structured. Typically, trainees pay good attention to meeting the differing needs of individuals working within the same group. Good use of individual, pair and small group work and a variety of creative and interesting practical activities help to keep learners motivated and involved in lessons. Trainees are skilful in the use of Information Communication Technology (ICT), as well as paper-based resources, and this supports their learners' progress well. Working relationships in lessons are very productive. The highly effective class and behaviour management skills, developed during the training, are deployed with confidence. Trainees are rightly mindful of the need to give high priority to safe working practices.

9. The majority of trainees are cognisant of the need to support their learners to improve their literacy, numeracy and ICT skills in the context of the specialist subject area. Many of them include the development of these skills in the planning and implementation of their lessons. Although most do this competently, a minority of trainees need to further develop their own literacy and/or numeracy skills to gain more confidence in this important feature of highly effective teaching practice.

10. Trainees make good progress in extending their understanding of the range and use of assessment methods. Overall, trainees' assessment practice is good. In the case of the most skilful trainees, assessment is thorough and informed by

comprehensive background information and initial assessment of their learners. Trainees use this very well alongside other strategies, such as question and answer and more formal testing, to monitor the progress of individuals and groups. The feedback they provide on learners' work is generally clear and helpful. They understand the requirements of their own students' coursework and external examinations very well.

11. Trainees provide very good individual, personal support. They are clear about how to secure additional help for learners if required. Most importantly, they know when to refer them on to wider specialist support. Trainees work closely and well with support assistants in their lessons. Those trainees with wider roles within the workplace provide suitable guidance to help learners to progress to further study or employment. Where workplace settings do not offer similar opportunities, trainees recognise this as an area for development in their professional practice.

Quality of training

12. Programmes are extremely well designed and coherent, with a clear structure and very effective balance of theory and practice. Links between the taught elements and trainees' workplace contexts are also very good. This offers significant support for trainees' professional development and facilitates continuous improvement in their practical teaching skills. Programme documentation such as handbooks and course materials are detailed and of high quality. They provide trainees, tutors and mentors with very clear guidelines on all aspects of the training.

13. The minimum core skills of literacy, numeracy and ICT are embedded appropriately into the training and assignments. Trainees' understanding of these areas is suitably reinforced through discussions in tutorials, observation feedback and through reflection in their own professional development journals.

14. The training is very effective in preparing trainees to teach and carefully planned, organised and thoughtfully implemented training sessions contribute to their skills development very well. Teacher trainers model good practice very effectively. They foster a particularly supportive atmosphere in classes, with good team work. Trainees gain great benefits from the opportunities to share ideas and good practice in an open and helpful way.

15. Teacher trainers provide highly effective personal support and are very responsive to individual trainees' needs. This contributes very well to keeping trainees on track, ensuring they complete the training successfully and that they make good or better progress. The initial assessment of trainees' literacy and numeracy needs is very effective, with follow up support available for those with identified learning needs.

16. Specialist subject support through mentoring is very effective for most trainees, although some further work is needed to ensure that all trainees have

access to mentoring of an equally high quality. Microteaching tasks and assignments are closely linked to trainees' specialist subjects. Trainers and mentors are very focused on directing trainees to consider how the generic aspects of their training can be applied to their individual teaching contexts and subject areas. Arrangements to ensure that all trainees experience a sufficiently wide range of teaching are not yet fully established.

17. Assessment on the programmes is rigorous, consistent and accurate. Assessment of trainees' competence in teaching their specialist subject is good. Written feedback provided by mentors and tutors is comprehensive and constructive and clearly identifies further areas for improvement. The monitoring and recording of trainees' development, through tutorials and milestone meetings, supports trainee progress very well.

18. Progress in the promotion of equality of opportunity is good. Trainees develop a good understanding of issues relating to social inclusion, the barriers to learning which many learners face and in particular of issues relating to the specific needs of learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. For a few trainees, their understanding of cultural and ethnic diversity and the wider application of this understanding in their teaching practice is an area for further development.

Management and quality assurance of provision

19. Leadership and management of the teacher training programmes are very good. Bath Spa University sets a clear strategic direction for the development of its further education teacher training provision, which is part of the university's broader strategy to widen participation, through working in partnership with a wide range of further education colleges. At the university the programmes form part of the Wessex partnership, which very successfully provides one point of contact between the university and the colleges. University and college managers provide strong leadership for the organisation, delivery and quality assurance of the training and successfully manage and implement changes to bring about improvement.

20. Partnership working is very effective. University and college staff jointly developed the newly validated programmes for 2007/2008. Very good work by the university liaison team, known as 'field affiliates', supports the successful and consistent implementation of the programmes across the partnership. They are highly effective in providing a clear and authoritative channel of communication between the university and the colleges. They support curriculum development and quality improvement very well.

21. The university's very effective collaboration with other higher education institutions in the area led to the successful bid for the South West Centre for Excellence in Teacher Training (SWitch). Very active involvement in SWitch, at a regional and national level, keeps teacher trainers fully up-to-date with research and developments in the post-compulsory education and training sector. The university

and colleges make very good use of research projects to support improvements in the quality of the training. For example, a university led project into the use of electronic learning, funded by a Centre for Excellence in Teacher Training (CETT) in the north of England, is very successfully supporting their trainees' use of ICT in their teaching and learning. Other constructive research projects in the past have covered tutoring, mentoring and the use of learner support.

22. Assessment is rigorous, consistent and accurate. Very effective moderation systems are in place across the partnership, for both assignment work and for observations of practical teaching. The work of the field affiliates is highly effective in ensuring that assessment practices are of a high quality across the colleges.

23. Resources to support training are very good, with teaching rooms of a high quality, and good access to library resources and computers. Staff resources are good. The use by trainees of the colleges' virtual learning environments (VLE) is good. However trainees' use of the university's VLE is not yet widespread.

24. Quality assurance is rigorous and quality improvement is highly effective at both Bath Spa University and the colleges. Comprehensive annual reviews of all the further education teacher training provision take place, leading to clearly identified actions for improvement. Visits by the university staff to the colleges are very regular and productive. Trainees are represented on Bath Spa University's Wessex partnership annual reviews and they regularly contribute to evaluations of course modules.

25. In 2007, Bath Spa University took the decision to end its teacher training contract with a partner college, after quality assurance arrangements indicated that standards were below that which the university would expect for a significant period of time and with little improvement evident. A well managed exit strategy was put in place for 2007/2008, with university staff directly managing and teaching the year two provision at the college. This strategy was highly effective, with all 22 trainees successfully completing the programme.

26. In 2007/2008, management actions by the university and colleges to secure improvements in equality of opportunity across the partnership were very productive. Good use was made of data in relation to ethnicity, gender, disability, location and age. The university developed a comprehensive action plan on equality and diversity, which was regularly monitored and evaluated. It also organised and hosted a well-attended and informative conference for trainees on equality and diversity. A project to widen participation from minority ethnic and other under-represented groups is now established, but it is too early to judge the impact of this new initiative.

Appendix list of colleges

The following colleges were members of the HE Partnership at the time of the inspection:

Bridgwater College
Norton Radstock College
Weston-Super-Mare College
Weymouth College
Wiltshire College