

# Edge Hill University

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A further education teacher training  
inspection report  
2007/08

Managing inspector  
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## The inspection

1. The inspection was carried out in accordance with the framework for the inspection of initial training of further education (FE) teachers and the guidance in the handbook for the inspection of initial training of further education teachers, both published in 2004. It was conducted in two phases by Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) and additional inspectors. During the first phase which took place in February 2008, inspectors focused on the quality of training and management and quality assurance procedures. In the second phase, inspectors evaluated the achievements of FE trainees through observing their teaching and gathering evidence of their progress during the course. Phase 2 of the inspection was completed in June 2008.

## Background

2. Edge Hill University is a substantial provider of initial teacher training and continuing professional development courses. Provision for the learning and skills sector is a growth area within the university. Enrolments expanded significantly in 2007/08 through the increased involvement of partner colleges. The university currently works in partnership with three colleges of FE and two police training centres to deliver initial teacher training for FE teachers and other trainers from the post-compulsory sector. In April 2007 the university validated its new teacher training programme to reflect the qualification reforms within FE teacher training.

3. The university offers a Certificate in Higher Education Post Compulsory Education and Training (at levels 4 and 5) and a Professional Graduate Certificate of Education (PGCE) in Post Compulsory Education and Training (level 6). These qualifications have been endorsed by Standards Verification UK (SVUK) and satisfy the Secretary of State's requirements for FE teachers. At the time of inspection there were 158 trainees enrolled on courses across the partnership. The majority of trainees are enrolled on in-service provision; the university offers a full time pre-service course on the university campus and at one of the partner colleges. A small number of pre-service trainees are enrolled on part-time courses.

## Effectiveness of provision

4. The overall quality of provision is good (grade 2). Trainees are well-motivated and enthusiastic, and their learning is enriched by the wide range of experiences they bring to their training. They make good role models and draw effectively on their prior experience to make their specialist subjects exciting and accessible for students. Trainees' reflections on their own learning vary in quality, and do not result in sufficiently targeted actions to improve their classroom practice. Trainees benefit from the highly skilled teaching and assessment by their teacher-trainers and from the strong collaboration between the university and its partner colleges. Overall, trainees make good progress because of the excellent personal support and the incisive feedback they receive from their tutors and mentors.

However, opportunities to teach and assess across different levels and types of courses is not a routine part of training for all trainees. The provision has a strong focus on diversity and inclusive practice and trainees carry this through to their own teaching. Management of the partnership is strong. Recent changes to quality assurance procedures have resulted in a self-critical and rigorous approach to monitoring and reviewing the quality of provision across the partnership as a whole. Mentor support provided to trainees based in partner institutions is generally good but is more variable for trainees located in placements outside the partnership.

## Key strengths

Inspectors identified the following strengths:

- trainees' inclusive classroom practice
- trainees' good use of their specialist subject expertise to enliven their lessons and motivate their students
- well qualified and highly experienced teacher trainers who consistently provide trainees with models of good practice
- excellent personal support for trainees from trainers, mentors and learning services based at the university
- high quality feedback on teaching observations completed by mentors and tutors which underpins trainees' self-confidence and good progress
- strong collaboration across the partnership with clear direction from the university
- good initiatives to widen access to FE teacher training for non-traditional learners
- very good integration of teacher training with college procedures for quality assurance and managing staff.

## Areas for attention

The partnership should address:

- the insufficient opportunities for some trainees to develop their teaching, assessment and professional practice more widely across the FE teacher role

- the wide variation in the degree of formality and rigour with which trainees use reflection and self evaluation to inform targets for their professional development
- the inconsistencies in the quality of mentoring in the workplace, in particular for trainees who are not located in partner institutions.

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

## Achievements of trainees

5. Trainees develop a sound understanding of the professional values and practice required for teaching in the lifelong learning sector. Many undertake wider reading and research to extend and deepen their understanding of education and skills policy. Trainees are able to identify good practice and areas where they need to improve. They are receptive to constructive criticism and draw on feedback from their tutors and mentors to improve their classroom practice. As a result of skilful training, trainees are proficient in justifying their choice of teaching methods in relation to educational theories and their knowledge of teaching techniques. The degree of formality and rigour with which trainees engage in self-evaluation is too variable. Reflective journals and evaluations of lessons are not always completed systematically. The consequence of this is that the targets trainees establish for their on-going professional development are not as sufficiently focussed or precise as they should be.

6. The best trainees demonstrate their commitment to raising students' achievements by systematically tracking their progress, providing clear guidance on how they can improve and giving feedback that motivates their students to give of their best. Trainees also make effective links with other professionals, both within and external to their organisations, to ensure that their students are provided with all the support they need to make progress. In-service trainees benefit especially from being in the role of personal tutors which extends their experience and expertise in pastoral guidance and support. Trainees work hard and make good role models. They develop particularly good relationships with their students, which greatly supports learning.

7. Trainees are able to draw on a broad range of teaching methods. Most generally manage learning well and ensure that students are involved in a variety of activities. Trainees are confident in using question and answer techniques to mould students' learning and ensure even the most reluctant learners become involved in lessons. The best trainees actively engage their students in exploring problems, developing ideas and finding solutions. Trainees frequently draw on techniques and practical resources modelled to them by their own tutors and transfer them successfully to their own working context. They demonstrate good skills in class management.

8. Trainees understand the importance of planning lessons to ensure that all students can participate and achieve. They are confident in formulating learning objectives and make reference to them during lessons to check the progress made by students. They are also skilful in planning the content and sequencing of topics and invariably consider ways of extending the most able and supporting the least able students. Weaker trainees sometimes fail to take account of the range of students' individual learning needs. For example, they do not systematically draw on targets or information contained in their students' individual learning plans.

9. Learning resources and lesson handouts are produced to a high standard and care is often taken to ensure that they do not convey stereotypical images or messages. For example, in some subjects which traditionally recruit a high proportion of male students, trainees have actively promoted positive images of women in their discussions, handouts and presentations.

10. Trainees are well qualified in their specialist subjects and enliven their lessons by drawing on their occupational expertise. They make very good use of their considerable subject knowledge to illustrate concepts within their teaching and to convey professional standards to their students. For example, in one class, a trainee teaching dance was able to re-create the atmosphere and demands of a professional dance studio. Students responded well to the high expectations she conveyed and consequently the quality and maturity of their work were very high. Trainees are generally confident in using information and communication technology (ICT) as a teaching aid. However this is mainly limited to the use of PowerPoint presentations.

11. Trainees' ability to assess their students' progress both formatively and summatively is variable. They have acquired a clear understanding of different methods of assessment and their purpose, but there are few examples of trainees setting their students individual targets for improvement and following these up as part of on-going reviews of learning. In a few cases, pre-service trainees have had very little involvement in assessing or marking against awarding body criteria. Where trainees are involved in marking and assessing work they provide helpful suggestions on how students can improve their work.

12. Trainees are able to explain very clearly how they promote diversity and inclusive learning in their classroom practice. They provide a good level of personal support for individuals and actively seek to remove any barriers that prevent their students from making progress. Some in-service trainees have extensive experience of supporting learners with particular learning difficulties or disabilities. Trainees demonstrate an excellent understanding of the *Every Child Matters* agenda and are skilful in addressing their students' literacy and numeracy needs. For example, in a business studies lesson, the trainee drew expertly on a case study of a multi-national fast-food chain, to raise her students' awareness of healthy eating. By developing their skills in using percentages and drawing graphs at the same time she gave good attention to their future economic well-being.

## Quality of training

13. Individual elements of the newly endorsed and of the legacy courses are progressive and cohere well. The jointly planned content draws effectively upon the expertise of course teams based in colleges and at the university. The integration of teaching practice within each individual course module of the new qualifications ensures that trainees make direct links between theory and practice. The structure of the new course does not facilitate access or progression for trainees who may have already achieved a unit-based qualification within the new qualifications framework. Course teams at the university and within individual centres collaborate well and are mutually supportive in terms of sharing good practice and resources.

14. Course documentation is comprehensive and clear. The training incorporates well recent developments and national policy in post compulsory education and training. Where trainees have identified a need for further training in either study or teaching skills, or where observation feedback across a cohort identifies weaknesses, additional workshops have been put on to address these needs. These have been very well received by trainees.

15. The overall quality of sessions taught by teacher trainers is good, and the quality of sessions at the university is very good. Trainers are skilled in demonstrating the use of a wide range of teaching methods which trainees take away and apply within their own teaching. Trainers are sensitive to the diversity of vocational areas represented within their sessions and plan carefully to ensure that trainees work in a range of different groupings and contexts in the course of a session. Trainers encourage their trainees to extend their knowledge and understanding of topics through wider reading and individual research. This research is facilitated well through the extensive range of additional reading and learning resources which trainees access through the university's Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) and the VLEs developed by individual colleges.

16. Trainees value highly the individual support they receive from their tutors and mentors. Support for trainees with specific learning needs is excellent – it is well publicised and has high visibility. The university's learning services, Edge Ahead, forges very strong links with individual partner colleges. Trainees based at the university as well as those based in partner colleges make very good use of the information, resources and tailored support available to them through this high quality service. Pre-service trainees on the full-time courses adapt quickly to the demands of the workplace. They adjust to the reality of teaching in post compulsory education and training because they are prepared well for their placement and have realistic expectations of what they have to face.

17. The initial assessment and diagnosis of trainees' literacy, numeracy and ICT skills are thorough, and results in generally clear and targeted actions for development. However, this process does not provide sufficient opportunity for trainees to give an equally thorough consideration of their pedagogic needs. Individual development plans (IDPs) completed by pre-service trainees are more

thorough and of higher quality than those completed by in-service trainees. A minority of mentors have only a superficial, if any, awareness of their trainee's IDP.

18. There is a strong focus on developing trainees' subject pedagogy through discussion in sessions, assignment activities and the contributions of workplace mentors. All trainees have a subject specialist mentor; the vast majority are trained and experienced within their specialism. Mentors take particular care to introduce trainees to learning resources and techniques that relate to their specialist area.

19. Within their teaching roles, some trainees do not have sufficient opportunities to develop their skills and knowledge across wider aspects of the FE teacher role. Where the quality of workplace mentoring is strong, trainees have been inspired to seek out and explore opportunities to widen their professional practice. For example, in some cases trainees have taken the initiative to observe teachers working with different age ranges in other institutions. However not all mentors systematically ensure that trainees gain a breadth of teaching experience, for example in teaching different age groups, different levels or experiencing both one to one and whole group teaching.

20. Assignments are used well by trainees to extend their knowledge and understanding of the principles of teaching theory and practice. Assessment practice is strong; feedback to trainees is constructive and fair. The marking of coursework is thorough and the accuracy of judgements made is moderated appropriately by course teams. The feedback given to trainees following their teaching practice observations is of consistently high quality. Trainees make good use of the incisive and comprehensive comments from both tutors and mentors to improve their classroom practice.

## Management and quality assurance of provision

21. The process of admission and induction is friendly and supportive. Selection is rigorous and requires applicants to attend an assessment centre to undertake tasks to assess they have the appropriate skills, expectations and aspirations in order to succeed. Admissions processes are discussed at partnership meetings to ensure commonality of approach. Consequently, retention rates for courses based at the university have improved significantly over the last three years. Checks are completed in a timely way to ensure that all pre-service trainees are suitable to work with children or other vulnerable members of society. Resources across the partnership are generally good. Trainees are taught by very well-qualified teams of teacher-trainers. Through their research and involvement in working groups, members of staff at the university make a significant contribution to regional and national developments relating to post compulsory education and training policy.

22. The partnership's attention to equality of opportunity is good. Equality and diversity impact measures are used well to evaluate the quality or provision both within individual colleges and across the partnership as a whole. Inclusion and



diversity are key themes that permeate the content and delivery of courses. There are some good initiatives to recruit and support trainees from under-represented groups. For example, the university has introduced a very popular 'taster' course which lasts for three days and provides a one-day placement in a local college. There are similar approaches to widening participation within partner colleges.

23. Partners share a common vision and goals for the future of the partnership. The university ensures that its growing provision and the partnership have visibility both within the university and across the region. Colleges new to the partnership are supported well by the university. Partnership meetings are valued and well-attended. These meetings provide a forum for the sharing of good practice and research. The partnership is strong, consultative and ambitious; partners feel equal and all are able to play a full part in developing and improving the provision. Communication between partner organisations is good and this is underpinned by a clear and well understood framework for resourcing and quality assurance. There is a strong team ethos both within individual colleges and within the partnership as a whole. College representatives are consulted and are actively involved in decision-making processes.

24. The university has invested substantial resource in developing procedures for the monitoring of partnership provision. There are collaborative delivery plans for each college. A university verifier visits partners to ensure university requirements are adhered and that the annual monitoring report accurately reflects the health of the programme. However, these visits are based on meetings and discussion rather than direct sampling and triangulation of sources of evidence.

25. Quality assurance arrangements within individual colleges are good. Links between initial teacher training and wider aspects of staff induction, quality assurance and professional development are very strong. For example, in one college the human resource department funds an outward bound event which constitutes an initial college induction of new staff and an induction onto the initial teacher training programme.

26. Quality assurance for the partnership as a whole is satisfactory and improving. Since phase 1 of the inspection, the university has undertaken a very thorough review of quality assurance systems. A revised framework has been established which provides a more systematic and coherent process for the partnership to be able to pinpoint its unique strengths as well as recognise how further improvements can be made. In particular, steps have been taken at the university to increase resources to ensure all trainees have access to timely and high quality placements. Improved systems for tracking and monitoring of teaching observations and quality assurance of mentors' contributions are also under review. However, the quality and impact of mentoring are not evaluated systematically either by the university or partner colleges. The framework for mentoring is generally strong within partner colleges, but is less well developed for those trainees who are located in organisations outside the partnership. The university has recognised the need to ensure greater levels of consistency in trainees' experience of mentoring and appropriate plans are in place.

27. The university is being more proactive in seeking mentors' and trainees' views of the quality of provision. Although it is too early to see the impact of these recent developments on the overall quality of trainees' experiences, a more thorough and self-critical evaluation report for 2008 indicates strong capacity for further improvement in 2008/09. The university is also starting to draw on expertise in its secondary teacher training provision to enhance its FE provision.

## Appendix list of colleges

The following providers were members of the HEI partnership at the time of inspection:

Knowsley Community College

Trafford College

Hopwood Hall College