

University of Exeter

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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 and additional inspectors. During the first phase which took place in November 2007, inspectors focused on the quality of training and the management and quality assurance procedures. In the second phase, inspectors evaluated the achievements of 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. The University of Exeter works in partnership with four colleges of further education (FE) across the South West to provide initial teacher training (ITT) courses for teachers in further education colleges or elsewhere in the lifelong learning sector. There is no discreet group of trainees at the university. The university hosts three joint centre days for all trainees at the university plus an additional two days for full time trainees. The vast majority of delivery is by college-based practitioners in the workplace. The Department of Post-Compulsory Education is a small department within the School of Education and Lifelong Learning. A member of staff from a partner college is currently seconded part time to the department.

3. The partnership provides initial teacher training for 24 trainees on full time generic pre-service courses in two partner colleges and 81 trainees on part-time in-service courses across all four partner colleges. Trainees study the Post Graduate Certificate of Education (PGCE). Since September 2007 the PGCE offered incorporates modules at Masters level. Trainees must pass eight formal assessments of practical teaching, two of which are conducted by subject specialist mentors.

Effectiveness of provision

4. The overall quality of provision is good (grade 2). Trainees make good progress. They are well qualified and display strong professional values and specialist subject knowledge. They demonstrate good practice in teaching their subjects and are committed to raising the achievement of their learners. Teacher trainers are highly skilled and experienced, model good practice and support trainees well. Most teacher trainers are advanced practitioners who play a significant role in the college's professional development programme. Trainees are encouraged to reflect self critically and to focus their lessons on the impact on learning. Trainees who work in colleges are generally well supported by mentors in the development of their subject specialist teaching skills. The provision of specialist subject support for external trainees is less effective. Trainees' progress is tracked through an individual learning plan (ILP) however this is insufficiently developed to enable all trainees to

plan their personal development effectively. There are weaknesses in target setting with trainees. Good partnership relationships result in effective sharing of good practice and other collaborative activities. The partnership has reacted swiftly and appropriately to address weaknesses identified during phase 1 of the inspection. Action taken has had a significant impact on the quality of current trainees' experience but needs to be fully embedded to ensure consistency across the partnership.

Key strengths

Inspectors identified the following strengths:

- well qualified trainees, with thorough specialist subject knowledge and a commitment to their learners' achievement
- training that models good practice and focuses on reflection and the impact on the learner
- very good personal support and guidance provided by course tutors
- good use of mentors to develop trainees' teaching in their specialist area
- strong partnership relationships
- highly effective relationship between ITT and colleges' workforce reform strategy
- effective action leading to improvements in training.

Areas for attention

The partnership should address:

- the quality of target setting with individual trainees
- the embedding of improvements in quality assurance arrangements
- subject specific work-based training for a small minority of trainees in roles in the wider lifelong learning sector.

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 good progress during their training. They have strong professional skills, knowledge and experience which they bring to lessons for the benefit of learners. They are well qualified and many have very good specialist subject knowledge. Many take on wider roles and make a broader contribution to college life. Trainees display a strong commitment to learners' achievements and know their learners well.
6. Trainees show good personal commitment to their own professional development. Most in-service trainees maintain a sharp focus on current practices in the vocational field, deriving from their own contemporary professional experiences. The ability to reflect self critically is generally well developed although a few trainees do not routinely evaluate the outcomes of lessons they have taught.
7. Typically trainees demonstrate very good communications skills and build excellent working relationships with their learners. Some use praise well to motivate learners. In lessons they use a good range and variety of teaching methods and approaches that keep learners focussed and engaged in their work. They have high expectations of their learners.
8. In most lessons trainees introduce sessions well, by sharing aims and making links to previous work. A few trainees are less successful in structuring final reflections and plenary sessions and reinforcing key learning points. Trainees use teaching resources appropriately and most adapt lesson content to meet the needs of their learners whether to manage group size, deal with challenging behaviour or to raise learners' confidence levels. Trainees make effective use of information learning technology (ILT) including the inter-active whiteboard to encourage learner participation in the lesson. Where in-class support is provided, a small minority of trainees do not provide explicit direction for the support worker.
9. Lessons are generally very well planned and incorporate varied teaching strategies, assessment and learning resources. Trainees effectively encourage their learners to make links between theory and their own practice. The promotion of equality and diversity is evident in schemes of work and lesson plans and is particularly effective in one partner college. While a minority of trainees plan lessons based on detailed profiles of learners' needs, others pay insufficient attention in their planning and delivery to identifying or addressing individual learning needs.
10. Trainees demonstrate good use of questioning for example to assess learners' knowledge, understanding and progress; the use of questions to stimulate further thinking is generally less well developed. Feedback on marked work is of a good standard with suitable comments to help the student make further progress. However some trainees have limited opportunity to design and carry out either diagnostic or formal summative assessments, including the giving of verbal and written feedback. Trainees demonstrate good awareness of their learners' starting points and monitor their progress well.

11. Trainees are aware of support available to their learners and sign post and use referrals as necessary. Some trainees are particularly effective because they use their wider knowledge and experience, for example their links in the community, with outside agencies or college support services. A few trainees are unaware of the full range of programmes available within their curriculum area.

Quality of training

12. The PGCE programme is well structured and meets national standards. It is strongly practical with a clear focus on learning and the learner, reflection and the use of research. Theoretical and practical elements are effectively integrated: trainees have ample opportunities to explore the application of theory to their own practice and to reflect on the efficacy of their practice. The elective element of the PGCE gives trainees' flexibility and a stimulating opportunity to engage in scholarly activity with a direct application to their teaching.

13. Joint centre days are a distinctive and innovative feature of the PGCE programme, enabling more detailed coverage of a range of educational developments and facilitating subject specialist groupings. Trainees attend the University of Exeter for three days each year firstly as an induction, then as a curriculum module, culminating in a curriculum "fayre". Two additional days are arranged for pre-service trainees. Attendance on these centre days is compulsory. Feedback from trainees is positive and informs future planning of content and delivery.

14. Literacy and numeracy are embedded effectively in the PGCE course structure. They are mapped to assignments and incorporated into reflective and evaluative documentation. In one college the skills for life tutors are part of the ITT team and play a very active role in curriculum development.

15. Training provided across the partnership is good. Teacher trainers plan their sessions well and model good practice. They use varied teaching strategies and technologies, actively engage learners, assess learning effectively and often build on the direct experiences of learners. A wide variety of ILT is used to enliven and enrich teaching. Most partner colleges have well developed virtual learning environments (VLE) and these are well referenced. Additional materials are available to all trainees through the university's VLE which trainees access widely.

16. Course tutors provide very good personal support and guidance to trainees and are responsive to their individual needs. Trainees speak highly of this support. The partnership is seeking to broaden the range of teaching experience of trainees but for some it remains narrow, especially those teaching in non-college environments. Some trainees who teach on higher level programmes would welcome the opportunity to gain experience at lower levels.

17. Initial assessment processes and support needs have not been reviewed following the introduction of the PGCE at the higher level. A few trainees require additional support in language and literacy skills which is provided informally by tutors. Trainees entering the PGCE through exemption do not submit written work until later in the programme and their need can go undetected until then.

18. Mentors provide the majority of trainees with good guidance and support to develop their teaching in their specialist area. Trainees based in the colleges benefit from trained mentors, established systems and a culture that supports mentoring and the professional development of staff. The provision of specialist subject support for external trainees is less effective. At the start of the year inspectors identified low levels of training for mentors. The partners acted promptly and all mentors have now been trained effectively.

19. The use of ILPs to track trainees' progress is underdeveloped. The partnership has revised the ILP for future use and has piloted this successfully in one partner college. The revised ILP brings together progress information from all sources more effectively to enable trainees to plan their own development. There are weaknesses in target setting; the setting and monitoring of targets is not systematic with all trainees; targets are often task oriented; there is insufficient evidence of targets arising from work with mentors.

20. Assignments are well structured and enable trainees to effectively make links between theory and practice. They are thoroughly marked with appropriate and constructive comments on generic aspects such as the quality of content and style but there is some inconsistency in subject specific feedback. Trainees have expressed confusion on the assessment criteria for written assignments. As a result of feedback partners have clarified the criteria by level during the year, and have run a training session for trainees on the requirements of higher level work.

Management and quality assurance of provision

21. Systems and procedures for the selection and recruitment of trainees are good across the partnership. Recruitment information is thoroughly analysed and used to inform management decisions. Interview processes are fully documented with clear criteria for assessment and selection. Pre-course tasks are agreed with the university. At the start of the year university registration processes impacted negatively on several trainees who were unable to access resources in a timely manner. This is recognised by the university and improvement is planned for the next academic year. Trainees on Lifelong Learning UK (LLUK) programmes, including Diploma to Teach in the Lifelong Sector (DTLLS), in partner colleges, are not yet aware of progression opportunities onto the PGCE or alternative qualifications. An exemption protocol has recently been devised by the university from LLUK qualifications to the PGCE.

22. The university and partner colleges have effective equality policies and procedures in place and meet the statutory requirements for the implementation and monitoring of policies on equal opportunities and the promotion of good race relations.

23. In all partner colleges there is a highly effective relationship between ITT and colleges' workforce reform strategy. Teacher trainers are influential in continuing professional development within the colleges. Most are advanced practitioners who support individual members of staff to improve their practice. Others from the advanced practitioner team support ITT for instance in observing trainees' lessons.

24. Partnerships are strong. Formal partnership agreements set out roles and expectations of all partners. Partner colleges have worked well together to develop the wider suite of teacher training qualifications and have worked with the university on PGCE developments. A college new to the partnership has been well supported by all partners. Partners jointly plan all aspects of provision and undertake collaborative research projects. The university website has clear links to partner college sites. A manager from a partner college has been seconded to the university this academic year undertaking development work.

25. The partnership has robust procedures for the internal and external moderation of assessment of trainees' written assignments and the external moderation of assessment of trainees' practical teaching by tutors. The partnership has developed a process for the moderation of trainees' practical teaching by mentors; this is at an early stage of development.

26. There is an appropriate range of quality assurance processes across the partnership. These are closely monitored by the university. External examiners' reports are actioned effectively, and trainee feedback is sought through the termly boards of study and through questionnaires. The post compulsory education (PCE) quality assurance annual report addresses major issues identified during the year which are of consequence for the whole partnership.

27. At the start of the inspection the university's knowledge of relevant strengths and weaknesses in each partner college was limited. The university now works more closely with each partner college for example through more visits. All partners have taken prompt and effective action to address issues raised through inspection. The partnership has introduced new systems to strengthen standardisation and promote consistency. A PCE partnership co-ordinator has been appointed to assist in this. Action taken has had a significant impact on the quality of current trainees' experience but needs to be fully embedded to ensure consistency across the partnership.

Appendix list of colleges

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

Exeter College
South Devon College
Strode College
Yeovil College