

University of Chester

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A further education teacher training
inspection report
2007/08

Managing inspector
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The inspection

1. This inspection was conducted in two phases by an Additional Inspector. One of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) and a specialist Additional Inspector took part in the second phase of the inspection. During the first phase, which took place in December 2007, the managing inspector focused on the quality of training and management and quality assurance procedures. During the second phase, inspectors concentrated on evaluating the achievements of trainees through observing their teaching and gathering evidence of their progress during the course. The second phase of the inspection was completed in June 2008.

Background

2. The University of Chester, in conjunction with Warrington Collegiate, provides initial teacher training courses for further education (FE) teachers and other trainers from the post-compulsory sector. The two-year, part time Certificate in Education (Cert Ed) in teaching in the Learning and Skills Sector course was introduced in 2007 and replaced the Certificate of Higher Education in Further and Adult Education (Cert HE). At the time of the inspection, 55 trainees were completing the second year of the Cert HE, with 32 trainees having commenced study on the new Cert Ed programme. The university works with the college in designing and developing the programmes, which are then delivered by college staff. The university validates and has overall responsibility for assuring the quality of the programmes.

Effectiveness of provision

3. The overall quality of provision is good (grade 2). Trainees develop a professional approach to their work and show high levels of commitment to teaching. Many make very good progress during the programme, as a result of the tailored support that very effectively builds their confidence as teachers. The extent to which trainees understand their role and responsibilities within the *Every Child Matters* agenda varies considerably. A minority of trainees do not make full use of assessment information to plan their students' future learning. The college has considerable success in working with trainees from vocational backgrounds, particularly the construction industry. Effective links have been established with those working in prison education. The content of the new course has been carefully thought out to ensure that the diverse needs of trainees are met. Teacher trainers are extremely dedicated to their work, and the quality of their training sessions at Warrington Collegiate is a significant strength of the provision. Mentors are keen and enthusiastic. Their role has developed well over the past year, and many are now making an important contribution to the training programmes, particularly in relation to subject-specific issues. Overall, mentors are well-prepared for their roles and give good quality support and guidance to trainees. However, a small minority of staff do not always provide sufficiently detailed feedback, particularly in regard to trainees'

areas for development. The provision is well-managed and staff maintain a constant dialogue with the appropriate personnel at the university. Teacher trainers are beginning to establish effective systems for assuring the quality and consistency of mentoring. There is a genuine commitment to continuous course development and improvement.

Key strengths

Inspectors identified the following strengths:

- the high levels of professionalism consistently demonstrated by trainees
- the good quality course content, which successfully caters for the diverse needs of trainees
- the high quality tailored support for individuals, that leads to trainees making very good progress
- the good, and often excellent training sessions led by members of the core teacher training team at Warrington Collegiate
- the commitment and enthusiasm of mentors, who provide good quality support and guidance.

Areas for attention

The partnership should address:

- the failure of a minority of trainees to systematically draw on assessment information to plan their students' future learning
- the considerable variation in the extent of trainees' understanding of *Every Child Matters* and related issues
- the small minority of staff who do not always provide sufficiently detailed feedback to trainees

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

Achievements of trainees

4. Trainees demonstrate very high levels of commitment to their work as teachers. Good quality input on attitudes and values by college staff helps to ensure

that trainees consistently demonstrate high levels of professionalism. Trainees work with learners from a very diverse range of backgrounds, including some that present challenging behaviour. In supporting the learning of these students, trainees typically show sensitivity and empathy. They often act as good role models. For a minority of trainees, lack of confidence in leading learning is an issue at the start of the course; this is very successfully addressed through the support of teacher trainers.

5. The course places much emphasis on critical reflection and trainees respond well to this. They are encouraged to write open and honest evaluations of their work, and to assess constantly their progress in developing teaching skills. In many cases, this written evaluation clearly indicates that trainees make great strides during the course in refining their analytical skills and improving the quality of their academic writing. Trainees' commitment to their future professional development is a significant strength. For many, the course has inspired them to continue their studies.

6. The majority of trainees use a variety of teaching styles to engage their students. Lessons typically include a variety of whole class, small group and individual tasks, which helps to keep students motivated. They are fully aware of preferred learning styles, and most show careful consideration of this when working with individual students. All trainees understand the importance of recognising students' achievements and giving praise in order to promote rapid progress. Most trainees use questioning skills well, and there are some examples of excellent practice, where the skilful use of dialogue very effectively extends students' knowledge and understanding. In a minority of cases, trainees' use of questioning is less well developed, with limited exploration of students' responses, and lack of challenge for students. Good quality training on the use of information and communication technology (ICT) ensures that most trainees, including those who start the course with limited skills in this area, use resources such as interactive whiteboards effectively. Trainees manage their classes safely, and the great majority are confident in leading learning.

7. Trainees have good specialist subject knowledge. Many have extensive industrial experience and are able to apply their knowledge and skills very effectively when working with students. They often use demonstration of skills particularly well, which results in students aspiring to develop their own skills. Trainees have a secure knowledge of the programmes of study that they teach. They demonstrate good pedagogical understanding, and the most able trainees produce high quality materials and resources that very effectively support students' learning. The majority of trainees have a sound understanding of key skills, with the most able incorporating these successfully into their teaching.

8. The course places much emphasis on the importance of planning, and this is reflected in trainees' detailed lesson plans. Plans include clear aims and show that most trainees give careful consideration to learning outcomes and the rationale for the lesson. Plans also reflect the trainees' high expectations of their students. The most able trainees show, through their planning, that they have a very good

understanding of individual students' preferred learning styles. Schemes of work demonstrate a good understanding of progression for students. In a few cases, lesson plans include too little detail on how work can be adapted to meet individual students' needs.

9. Trainees have a good understanding of assessment. Trainees know their students very well. Almost all use a variety of assessment strategies, and most keep detailed records on their students' achievements. A few trainees are particularly skilled in the use of ongoing formative assessment during lessons, and provide excellent feedback to individual students. For a minority of trainees, information from assessment is used insufficiently well to plan future learning.

10. Trainees provide good quality support for their students. They have at least a sound understanding of progression routes for students, and are able to provide good guidance on these. A minority of trainees are particularly skilled in this area, and strongly believe that their students have a right to access programmes of study that enhance their skills and subsequent life choices. For example, one trainee had taken the initiative to contact appropriate staff within the college in order to set up additional support in key skills for his students. There is considerable variation in the extent of trainees' understanding of *Every Child Matters* and related issues.

Quality of training

11. Course content has been carefully designed to ensure that the programmes effectively meet the needs of all trainees. The overall programme is comprehensive, with the emphasis on skills development based on prior learning. Trainers are very keen to ensure that the most up-to-date trends and developments are reflected in reading materials and taught sessions. There is a good sense of progression and development, for example, in the shifting focus from the 'micro environment' of the classroom to the wider contexts of teaching. Trainees report that they find the course intellectually stimulating and suitably demanding. Provision for the development of trainees' skills in language, literacy, numeracy and ICT is satisfactory.

12. There is a good balance of theory and practical work, and trainees learn a great deal about teaching in a variety of contexts. Consequently, trainees typically have a good knowledge of the differing demands of teaching in post-compulsory education and training. A session on curriculum models helped trainees to consider the rationale and structure for various models in depth. Trainees are strongly motivated to pursue activities related to professional development. The contribution of visiting speakers ensures that trainees gain a wide spectrum of knowledge, and there are plenty of opportunities for them to develop ICT skills.

13. The course includes much reference to relevant reading materials. The timing of formal taught sessions, tutorials, mentor sessions and observations is appropriate throughout, and these support the trainees' ongoing development.

Documentation includes suggested agendas for tutorial meetings, which provide a good structure for discussion. The training is supported well through a range of relevant tasks and assignments.

14. The quality of sessions delivered by the core team of teacher trainers is a key strength. Trainers consistently model good, and often excellent practice, for example, in sharing objectives, directing learning and assessing outcomes. The quality of feedback on trainees' microteaching is at least very good, and often excellent, being succinct, sensitive, perceptive and encouraging. This models exemplary practice for the trainees themselves, who are then routinely asked to provide constructive guidance to those giving presentations. The lively and friendly atmosphere, including very good relationships with trainees, encourages total engagement. In addition, very careful consideration of trainee groupings ensures that they gain maximum benefit from the forum-like environment, which they feel is particularly successful in developing their skills. The virtual learning environment provides a range of useful resources for trainees, as well as course guidance materials.

15. Very good attention is paid to meeting trainees' individual needs during the formal taught sessions, including focus on their learning styles. Tasks are carefully considered to ensure that the level of challenge for each trainee is appropriate. Members of the core teacher training team know their trainees extremely well and constantly aim to provide personalised support, so that they make consistently good progress. All sessions include a strong emphasis on analysis and reflection.

16. The great majority of mentors are keen to support trainees and provide valuable subject specific guidance. They meet regularly with trainees to discuss progress, and provide ongoing formal and informal support. On occasions, other members of staff within a particular department observe trainees' teaching, and most trainees benefit from gathering a range of feedback. Mentors make a good contribution to the development of trainees' subject expertise. In a few cases, the quality of feedback provided to trainees is sometimes too brief and does not highlight areas for future development effectively enough. This is in contrast to the quality of feedback provided by core team teacher trainers, who give very detailed written guidance to trainees on how to improve their work.

17. Although there is evidence of a thorough exploration of prior experience very early on in the course, analysis of trainees' needs at the selection stage is limited, and there are no pre-course tasks. However, good quality initial needs analysis takes place during the first tutorial, with individual support from the tutor. Individual learning plans are compiled for each trainee and referred to in tutorials. Auditing of trainees' literacy, numeracy and ICT skills is secure, and follow-up support provided as necessary.

18. Course documentation outlines clear procedures for assessment. Feedback sheets for each assessable component are linked to learning outcomes and Standards Verification UK assessment criteria. There are also clear systems for mapping coverage of the minimum core throughout the course. Written work is

marked thoroughly and accurately. Systems for cross-moderation are secure, and final assessment is rigorous and thorough.

Management and quality assurance of provision

19. Initial training is integrated well with induction programmes for staff new to Warrington Collegiate. The Cert Ed programme is successful in recruiting suitable trainees, their needs being matched well to course content and structure. There is sound consideration of prior experience at the selection stage.

20. Workshop sessions, run by the core teacher training team before the course starts, are felt to be very useful by trainees. These sessions provide an overview of expectations, as well as the opportunity to question course staff. Web-based information on the programmes lacks detail, and provides limited information on the qualifications framework and progressions routes. As a result, a significant minority of trainees are not fully aware of the qualifications framework and the available options following completion of a particular course of study.

21. The dedication of the members of the core teacher training team is a significant strength. Through their delivery, management and development of the programme, they show an ongoing commitment to providing a widening range of experiences for their trainees. Some excellent collaborative work has been carried out amongst staff at Warrington Collegiate, who work very effectively together as a team. They work very well in establishing and developing links with trainers from outside agencies, such as the prison service, police force and various community-based learning partners.

22. Initial training provided for mentors is successful overall, although not all mentors are able to attend. Those who do attend clearly benefit from the training, being well prepared to carry out responsibilities such as lesson observation and feedback. As a result, some mentors provide consistently high quality support to their trainees. All mentors are provided with documentation to support their work and are therefore fully aware of their responsibilities; however, there remains some inconsistency in the quality of mentoring across the programme. Members of the core teacher training team are fully aware of this, and have devised a number of strategies for the future development of mentors. Course leaders have actively sought feedback from mentors and are acting upon it.

23. A continuous and productive dialogue is maintained between the university and the college. The university provides a clear framework for quality assurance of the programme, and college staff carry out procedures well. The university monitors programme developments rigorously and provides feedback to the college. There have been a number of improvements to quality assurance systems this year. For example, joint observations involving teacher trainers and mentors are now much more frequent than previously, and these are very effective in establishing consistency of judgements. Feedback from trainees is also carefully considered when

evaluating the overall quality of mentoring and identifying priorities for improvement.

24. Members of the core teacher training team, together with university staff and senior leaders at the college, are extremely committed to improving the quality of provision. Their track record over the past year shows that they act swiftly on recommendations in order to bring about rapid improvements. Action planning is of good quality, and there is an effective cycle of monitoring and evaluation of action points. A range of evaluative information, including that from trainees, mentors and external agencies, is gathered and thoroughly analysed. As a result, there is good capacity for further improvement.