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A further education teacher training
inspection report
2007/08

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The inspection

1. This inspection took place 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 teachers*, both published in September 2004.
2. It was carried out in two phases by Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI), supported by specialist Additional Inspectors. In-service provision at two colleges was evaluated as part of the inspection. Inspectors focused on the quality of training and management and quality assurance procedures during the first phase, which took place in January 2008. During the second phase, inspectors evaluated the achievements of trainees through observing their teaching and gathering evidence of their progress during the course. Phase two of the inspection was completed in June 2008.

Background

3. The University of Essex works in partnership with two colleges: Colchester Institute and South East Essex College (SEEC) to provide initial teacher training (ITT) courses for further education (FE) teachers and other trainers from post compulsory education and training (PCET). The courses lead to the following qualifications: the Certificate in Education, the Professional Graduate Certificate in Education and the Post Graduate Certificate in Education. The structure, content and assessment of the ITT courses at the two colleges differ. Course teams have designed the training within a framework of awards determined by the university. All the courses have been endorsed by Standards Verification UK (SVUK) and satisfy the Secretary of State's requirements for PCET teachers. Trainees attend the courses on an in-service basis and are taught and assessed by college staff, subject to the university's quality assurance procedures. In 2007/08 approximately 230 trainees were enrolled on the programmes.
4. The courses are modular and have been designed to incorporate the Lifelong Learning UK (LLUK) units of assessment. Trainees holding National Awarding Body qualifications are able to gain credit for their prior achievements and to transfer on to later stages of the programme. For example, at Colchester Institute there is an accelerated five-term route for trainees who have completed equivalent ITT qualifications.

Effectiveness of provision

5. The overall quality of provision is good (grade 2). Trainees are enthusiastic and well-motivated. Their teaching is well planned and enlivened by their prior occupational experience. They grow in confidence and competence over the courses. However, trainees' working in adult and community settings, work-based learning and those working part-time in colleges experience too narrow a range of teaching. There is no expectation that they will be given the opportunity of working across different levels and types of courses as a routine part of their training. Trainees benefit from well-managed courses and very skilled teaching and assessment by the teacher-trainers. The subject support offered to trainees through mentoring is generally good for trainees on the first year of the programmes, but is more inconsistent for those on the second year. The partnership recognises this and has taken practical steps to improve the quality of support that trainees experience in the workplace. The two colleges and the partnership as a whole have self-critical and robust quality assurance procedures for evaluating the taught elements of the training. Procedures for evaluating the quality of mentoring and teaching practice are insufficiently robust.

Key strengths

Inspectors identified the following strengths:

- enthusiastic trainees who make good use of their own vocational experience to enrich their students' learning and assessment
- exemplary course materials, with particularly helpful modular handbooks at Colchester
- high standard of training sessions that include good demonstration of team teaching at SEEC
- wide access onto the ITT programme through introductory courses at SEEC and accelerated PGCE programmes at Colchester
- strong links between the ITT teams and human resource functions at each college
- rapid progress in developing procedures for collaboration and course development within a new ITT partnership
- thorough course review, evaluation and self-assessment procedures at college level that are leading to improvements to provision.

Areas for attention

The partnership should address:

- the insufficient opportunities for trainees, particularly those working in community and work-based learning settings and those on hourly-paid contracts to observe, assess and teach students across the range of age groups, levels and modes of attendance
- the underdeveloped quality assurance procedures at partnership level for monitoring and evaluating the achievements of trainees and achieving consistency of standards
- the insufficient opportunities for trainees across the partnership to extend their expertise in teaching their specialist areas.

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

Achievements of trainees

6. Trainees make progress over the courses and show high levels of enthusiasm and commitment to helping their own students to achieve. They are well qualified in their own subject areas. Many have considerable industrial experience and set demanding occupational standards for their students. For example, a trainee with professional experience in marketing insisted that student assignments were attractively presented to the standard a client might expect. However, not all trainees gain a sufficient breadth of teaching experience, for example in teaching and/or assessing different age groups and at different levels. This was particularly the case with trainees that were part-time teachers in FE and those who worked in community and work-based settings.

7. Trainees are very positive about the course and feel they have made good progress. They are generally able to reflect critically on their own performance and to evaluate and improve their teaching. For example, a trainee teaching students with learning difficulties found that maintaining a reflective journal had enabled her to review the balance between the activities of speaking, listening and role-play in her lessons and to develop teaching methods that engaged her students. Trainees' assignment work is strongly focussed on practical aspects of teaching and learning.

8. Trainees make use of a good range of teaching methods and materials. Project work and practical exercises are competently handled with trainees giving skilled feedback to their students to aid their understanding. For example, a trainee teaching visual arts on the theme of metamorphosis gave good feedback on students' drawings that had attempted to convert one style of art into another. However, most trainees paid insufficient attention to the written notes that their

students were making and assumed that the provision of handouts and the use of visual aids would enable their students to retain what had been taught.

9. Trainees demonstrate very good knowledge of their own specialist subjects and occupational areas which they draw upon to enrich the learning of their students. For example, a teacher of music drew upon her extensive knowledge and experience of voice production to help her students become better singers. All trainees made frequent and apposite references in lessons to specific professional practices from their own occupational areas.

10. Group activities are a feature of most trainees' lessons and clear direction is given to the students about who they should work with. Many trainees use appropriate questioning skills to check the students' understanding. A trainee teaching carpentry in a work-based setting demonstrated good use of questioning techniques. He asked open questions like 'how could we avoid warping in timber?' and 'what could we expect if it was stacked like this?' and directed these to specific learners.

11. FE trainees define lesson objectives clearly using college documentation. However, in some cases there is insufficient focus on study skills that place emphasis upon students' responsibilities for their own learning. Most trainees are skilled in the use of learning outcomes and make reference to them during lessons to measure the progress made by students. Trainees teaching in community and work-based learning contexts made use of the lesson planning documentation from their employing organisation, but this was often too limited in scope.

12. Trainees are encouraged through their coursework to gain a broad experience of the uses of assessment for learning. They have a thorough knowledge of the procedures and expectations of awarding bodies. They prepare students well, know how they are progressing and keep comprehensive records to monitor progress. Marked work is appropriately annotated, and feedback usually includes guidance on how the students might improve, although in some cases comments are too brief. Within their teaching roles, it was evident that some trainees benefit from a much wider exposure to different levels and types of assessment than others. For example, a trainee working within an adult and community learning context was restricted to teaching a level 1 course where the learning and assessment activities were on-line, mechanistic and over-prescribed by the examining body.

13. Most trainees are aware of their students' individual needs and alert to the roles of student services and other specialised units that they can draw upon. Many demonstrate great commitment and passion for the role of FE in giving students a second chance. For example a trainee teaching key skills to students, aged 16-19 had secured the cooperation of vocational teachers in integrating key skills into their vocational assignments. As a result both her students and the vocational course teams had developed much greater sensitivity to 'natural' opportunities for the teaching and assessment of literacy, numeracy and Information Communication Technology (ICT).

Quality of training

14. There is a strong emphasis upon the progressive development of teaching skills based upon self-critical review and linking theory with practice. Both courses are well structured and the modular handbooks on the Colchester courses provide trainees with excellent guidance on course content, assessment and relevant educational literature. Trainees are encouraged to apply wider theoretical perspectives to analyse their own professional practice.

15. Attention given to supporting the development of trainees' subject-specific teaching skills is satisfactory and the emphasis on this aspect of the curriculum is increasing. A subject-mentoring scheme has been piloted successfully for first-year trainees at Colchester who have benefited from regular contact with subject mentors and guidance on how to improve pedagogy linked to their specialist teaching. Whilst year one trainees have enjoyed good support from experienced and trained mentors, those on the second year have experienced far more inconsistent and occasionally inadequate support. This has constrained their opportunities for guidance from more experienced teachers in their specialist areas. Procedures for mentoring are also being improved at SEEC in recognition of insufficient trained and skilled mentors, especially for trainees employed in work-based learning providers. At partnership level, the university is providing a series of annual subject conferences for trainees in the same specialist areas. The first conference for FE teachers of business studies was held in July 2008.

16. Trainees benefit from the high standards set by teacher trainers, who have a detailed understanding of their trainees' needs and demonstrate the use of a wide range of teaching methods. At SEEC, learning is enriched by the extensive use of team teaching. Trainees are able to observe contrasting styles of teaching and benefit from different perspectives on teaching and assessment. At both colleges trainers are skilled in helping students to apply models of reflective practice to critical incidents in their own teaching practice to help them develop practical solutions for improvement.

17. Literacy, numeracy and ICT skills are well-embedded on the ITT courses at SEEC. However, the development of trainees' skills at Colchester Institute is too reliant on informal approaches. Too much emphasis is placed on trainees self-assessing their own levels of competence and seeking support to achieve the required standards. Although this approach suited many trainees, the course team has evaluated and adapted its approach so that more structured monitoring and follow-up is becoming routine.

18. Trainees benefit from dedicated support from the ITT teams. Links between ITT and wider aspects of staff induction and professional development are good. ITT is well-integrated with staff development and human resources management and information for new teachers has been updated so that they are well informed about the 2007 statutory requirements, linked to Qualified Teacher Learning and Skills

(QTLS). Recruitment, selection and initial guidance are strong features at both colleges. Trainees that have already gained National Awarding Body (NAB) qualifications do not have to repeat elements of the programme in which they are already competent. For example, at Colchester Institute there is an accelerated five-term programme for trainees with appropriate NAB qualifications.

19. Although assessment tasks are varied and have been planned to meet the LLUK professional standards, the burden of assessment is too great. Trainees are unclear about the differences between the standard of assignment work required for a post-graduate as opposed to a professional certificate in education. The course teams have recognised that there is much scope for reducing the volume of assessment and for clarifying the different assessment outcomes at levels five and six and have refined the assignments for the next cohorts of trainees. Peer assessment is a strong aspect of the courses. Trainees are required to observe one of their peers teaching in a different context. Assessment decisions are fair and accurate. Tutors provide detailed feedback on trainees' practical teaching at both colleges. However, procedures for the overall tracking of trainees achievements in teaching need further coordination on the Colchester courses, given the many staff that are involved in assessing trainees' teaching and recommending priorities for improvement.

Management and quality assurance of provision

20. Information given to trainees about the courses is well presented and accurate. Detailed information is provided on entry requirements, the application process, equal opportunities, funding and costs. Both colleges see ITT as part of their wider approach to developing their workforces.

21. Trainees at both colleges benefit from well managed courses. At Colchester the small team of ITT specialists are located within a wider Educational Centre which provides a broader group of skilled observers of trainees' teaching practice. The ITT team at SEEC participate in a wide range of staff development events for more experienced teachers designed to improve general standards of teaching. For example, they have run a series of seminars on how to improve teaching in large open-plan areas that are a major feature of the college's new building.

22. This is the first year that Essex University has validated ITT courses and the new partnership has already developed a strong ethos of collaboration. Meetings are well-attended and lively with teacher trainers from the two colleges having plenty of opportunities for comparing their practices and attending general staff development events at the university. Both colleges are members of the Eastern Centre for Excellence in Teacher Training and have benefited from collaborating with trainers at a regional level.

23. Resources used for ITT courses are generally good. Trainees are taught by well-qualified teams of teacher trainers. The SEEC campus has been rebuilt to a high standard and trainees benefit from well-equipped rooms and excellent ICT facilities.

24. The university does not have a school of education and is reliant on bringing in external consultants to provide advice on the specialist aspects of the ITT courses. Whilst this model has worked adequately in the initial development and validation of the courses, procedures for assessing the standards of trainees' achievements are underdeveloped. Whilst each college has rigorous processes of internal moderation, the University lacks its own expertise in this area. This has been recognised and procedures for cross-moderation of the standards reached by trainees at SEEC and Colchester have been introduced. The roles of external examiners have also been broadened to include the evaluation of teaching practice.

25. Self-critical course review, evaluation and self-assessment procedures are leading to continuing improvements across the partnership. Issues raised by trainees and external examiners are dealt with systematically. Prior to the inspection, the partnership and each college self-assessed the standards of its own provision. The judgements in their self-assessment reports broadly match those of inspectors. Issues raised by inspectors following phase 1 of the inspection were acted upon systematically.

26. Both colleges have taken active steps to widen participation on the ITT courses. SEEC is a leading partner in the NOVA consortium, a partnership of colleges, schools and training providers in the Thames Gateway that is tackling social exclusion in the area. ITT provision is reviewed within this wider context and specific ITT access courses are drawing a wider range of trainees into the sector. The partnership and individual colleges are alert to equal opportunities issues. Data on the backgrounds of trainees are analysed routinely and trainees' teaching is evaluated for the extent to which it is inclusive and takes account of individual learning needs.

Appendix list of colleges

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

Colchester Institute
South East Essex College