

The Open University

Initial Teacher Education inspection report

Provider address

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Introduction

1. This inspection was carried out by Her Majesty's Inspectors supported by a team of specialist inspectors in accordance with the *Framework for the Inspection of Initial Teacher Education (2008-11)*.
2. The inspection draws upon evidence from all aspects of the provision to make judgements against all parts of the inspection evaluation schedule in the framework. Inspectors focused on the overall effectiveness of the training in supporting high quality outcomes for trainees and the capacity of the partnership to bring about further improvements. A summary of the grades awarded is included at the end of this report.

Key to inspection grades

Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Satisfactory
Grade 4	Inadequate

Explanation of terms used in this report

Attainment is defined as the standard reached by a trainee at the end of their training.

Progress is judged in terms of how well a trainee has developed professionally from their starting point to the standard reached at the time of the inspection or at a suitable review point.

Achievement is judged in terms of the progress made and the standard reached by a trainee at the time of the inspection or at a recent assessment review point.

The provider

3. The Open University offers a professional certificate in education (PGCE) to teach in the 11 to 16 age range, with post-16 enhancement for most trainees, in the following subjects: design and technology, geography, mathematics, modern foreign languages (French, German and Spanish), music and biology, chemistry and physics. Successful trainees can take an additional masters-level module, leading to a post-graduate certificate in education, at the end of the course.
4. The teacher training provision at the Open University has many features that are, in many ways, unique. In particular, the flexible nature of the course with: six starting and three end points every year; three routes for trainees to match individual needs, prior experience and circumstances; and the use of self-study distance learning resources. In addition, trainees are located all across England and often undertake the required school experience placements in schools that work with the university infrequently. The partnership is managed through the network of regional tutors, who work closely with trainees, and the oversight of

the subject leaders based at the Open University in Milton Keynes. The trainees attracted to the Open University course often find the flexibility offered means that, because of their personal circumstances, this is the only way they can train to become a teacher. All of these factors raise significant challenges in providing training of consistently high quality for all trainees and ensuring good coherence between the different elements of the course. The lack of identifiable cohorts also makes it very difficult to undertake detailed analysis of trends in the outcomes for trainees.

5. The course is structured around an initial needs analysis followed by three key closely interrelated components:
 - a set of self-study modules organised around six themes at three levels – familiarisation, consolidation and autonomy – to provide the three routes for trainees
 - up to four school experience placements, depending on the trainee's route, each with a set of tasks linked to the module study
 - a portfolio of tasks and critical reflection that draws together the modules and school experience at each level.
6. There were around 350 trainees registered on the course at the time of the inspection, but only 31 were in the final school experience phase of the course.

Provision in the secondary phase

Key strengths

7. The key strengths are:
 - the effectiveness of the Open University model of training in providing excellent opportunities for a very wide range of people to join and remain in the teaching profession
 - the effectiveness of the interrelationship of the three main elements of the course in securing trainees' progress and achievement
 - the closeness of the monitoring of the personal and professional development of individual trainees through the subject leader – tutor – school-based mentoring system
 - the swiftness and effectiveness of interventions, when required, to keep a trainee on the course and secure their progress, and the adaptability and flexibility shown to provide high quality support for individuals
 - the quality of the initial needs analysis and individual training plan and the use of these to determine appropriate routes and to secure rapid progression for trainees from the start of the course
 - the personal qualities of the trainees, ensuring their suitability for the Open University course and how well these qualities are further developed to support trainees' progress and achievement
 - the level of critical reflection required of, and demonstrated by, trainees

- the focus of self-evaluation on the progress and achievement of individual trainees and the use of this in sustaining high quality and securing further improvements.

Recommendations

8. In order to improve further trainees' progress and attainment, the provider should:
 - show mentors how to provide more immediate and focused support for trainees following lesson observations to help them transfer their understanding from their module study to their teaching
 - provide greater clarity between any actions a trainee needs to take to fulfil course requirements and developmental targets.

Overall effectiveness

Grade: 1

9. The structure and flexibility of the Open University course provides high quality training for people who might not, and in most cases would not, otherwise have entered the teaching profession. They are trained well and the very large majority successfully complete the course and secure teaching posts that suit their personal circumstances. The overwhelming majority of successful trainees remain in teaching beyond the early years, a testament to their personal qualities and to the quality of training and support they receive. Even though the number is small, every case of non-completion is thoroughly investigated to make sure that there are no implications for selection, the training or the support provided.
10. The overwhelming majority of trainees make at least the expected progress from their starting points to attain at a good level; many do better than this. The proportion of trainees who are outstanding at the end of the training is increasing steadily. There is little difference between the achievement of different groups of trainees, including those studying different subjects and those on different routes. The university makes accurate judgements of trainees' progress, achievement and final attainment.
11. Trainees have many strong characteristics, particularly their self-motivation, organisational skills, determination, resilience, commitment to teaching and taking responsibility for their own professional development. They form good working relationships with students and with staff in schools. Their subject knowledge and 'subject knowledge for teaching' are developed and applied well. Trainees' lesson planning is extremely thorough. They use their good subject knowledge to deconstruct complex ideas to carefully plan steps in learning and do this well over sequences of lessons. They realise that the way they teach has a direct impact on students' behaviour. They consider ways to promote good behaviour through providing pace, variety and challenge in lessons as well as using effective strategies to manage poor behaviour when

necessary. Trainees show good depth of understanding of the complexity of special educational needs and/or disabilities and of teaching students who speak English as an additional language. A notable feature is the high quality of trainees' critical reflection on their teaching and progress, a skill developed well by the course.

12. Trainees have a good understanding of many aspects of assessment, but are less secure in monitoring students' learning during their lessons. They sometimes do not recognise potential barriers to learning, such as students having levels of literacy or numeracy below that needed to access the work in the subject. However, once this is discussed with them, they can describe how they could address this through their subject teaching. Through the Open University modules, trainees develop good understanding of the issues around teaching learners from a diverse range of ethnic, religious and cultural backgrounds. However, a small minority of trainees have very limited first-hand experience to further develop this understanding and schools do not always take the opportunity to support trainees in thinking about this during school experiences.
13. The high rate of retention and the progress made by trainees indicate clearly the extremely high quality of recruitment and selection procedures. Applicants' potential and aptitude for teaching are identified well, with good involvement of schools in this. Checking that potential trainees have the personal qualities and intellectual capacity required to be successful on the course is undertaken with the utmost rigour. The very high quality initial needs analysis, including the time spent in schools undertaking this, ensures that all trainees are placed on the most appropriate route, as indicated by the progress they make. The analysis also establishes an extremely useful benchmark to monitor trainees' future progress; it identifies early targets and ensures that all trainees make rapid progress from the start of the course. The quality of the initial analysis and the closeness of the monitoring of individuals mean that progress is constantly checked against clearly identified individual expectations as well as the general requirements of the course. The high quality outcomes also show the effectiveness of the Open University model in ensuring trainees take responsibility for their own progress and in preparing them well for their longer-term professional development.
14. The progress made by trainees is the result of a wide range of high quality features of the course. The self-study modules – school experiences – portfolio model and the interrelationship between these is an absolute strength; in particular, the quality of the module materials and the guidance provided by subject leaders, the strong links between the modules and the school experience tasks and activities, and the high level of critical reflection required in the portfolio. The progression through the sequence of modules and school experiences is extremely well planned and executed. These strengths in the structure of the course are complemented well by the strengths in the subject leader – tutor – school-based mentoring arrangements. These ensure consistently high quality training that is focused strongly on individual needs. The role of the Open University regional tutor is critical and the quality of training and support they provide is often exemplary. In addition, subject

leaders monitor individual trainees' progress exceptionally closely. Whenever a trainee's progress dips, for whatever reason, interventions by tutors and/or subject leaders are swift and highly effective. The high quality of personal support for trainees is highly impressive and valued greatly by all trainees.

15. The Open University uses an extremely effective system of grading trainees that combines a clear set of standards at each stage of the course, with expectations rising at each stage, and sets of criteria for grading trainees against these standards at each stage. This provides precision and rigour that ensures that trainees are absolutely clear about where they are and what they need to do at each stage of the course. Trainees are provided with sharp and incisive feedback from tutors and subject leaders at each stage. This builds well on the initial analysis and individual training plans. During school placements, trainees receive good feedback from mentors on their practical teaching. Any variations in the quality of mentoring are picked up and dealt with by tutors and, in some cases, by subject leaders quickly. This ensures that trainees' progress is as smooth as it can be. Trainees are set clear developmental targets, although these are sometimes mixed with 'things to do' related to the school-based tasks; this occasionally reduces the clarity of the targets. Many mentors use a good range of strategies to support trainees' progress, such as: collaborative planning and teaching, coaching, and focused observations of other teachers and groups of students.
16. The relationship between the self-study modules and school experiences is a strength of the course. Mentors and tutors help trainees make links between the work in the modules and their planning, teaching and assessment of learning during school placements. However, a minority of mentors need to provide more support for trainees in transferring their understanding from the modules to their teaching when providing feedback following lesson observations to give greater immediacy and relevance.

The capacity for further improvement and/or sustaining high quality

Grade: 1

17. All of the outcomes for trainees have been sustained at a good or better level and there is evidence of a trend of improvement in the proportion of trainees being judged to be outstanding overall. These improvements are more marked for school experience grades. There are clear plans in place to sustain this improvement; for example, more explicit training for all tutors in how to move good trainees to become outstanding and to continue to reduce the proportion of satisfactory trainees. This is one of many examples of how the university constantly strives to develop and improve the quality of the provision. All of the strengths identified in the last inspection report are still clearly evident. The key features of the Open University model have been retained and further enhanced.

18. Self-evaluation is comprehensive and thorough; it is extremely well embedded in all aspects of the programme and it is accurate and perceptive. The inspection judged the quality across the partnership to be outstanding, even though the provider judged this to be good. The provider evaluated this by recognising the inevitable variation in the quality of mentoring within a partnership of this type. The inspection judged that, whenever the quality of mentoring falls below that expected, swift and effective intervention means that all trainees make at least the expected progress. There is ongoing and constant review of the course through an excellent focus on trainees' progress and achievement.
19. The university uses three tiers of self-evaluation that work together extremely effectively. Firstly, there is ongoing and immediate evaluation based on the constant review of individual trainees' progress and achievement. Any examples of trainees not making the expected progress are reviewed carefully by subject leaders and the analysis informs the frequent programme meetings so that any implications across all subjects are fully considered and appropriate actions taken. This focus on the progress of individual trainees against clear expectations to inform self-evaluation is highly impressive. Tutors make regular visits to, and make frequent contact with, trainees during school placements and complete a useful quality assurance report on the school for each visit; this is sent to subject leaders. Subject leaders also undertake quality assurance visits with tutors. There are excellent communications between tutors and subject leaders. Tutors also maintain very close contact with trainees during the periods of self-study to monitor their progress; the outcomes of this monitoring also inform self-evaluation.
20. Secondly, the university's award board meets three times each year; the board considers the progress and achievements of all trainees at all levels, as well as considering external examiners' reports. These reports are thorough, analytical and provide very useful feedback on the course and on trainees' achievements at these three points in each year. These frequent meetings of the board enable the provider to very effectively detect any subject or programme-wide issues that are then addressed by course and subject leaders. Finally, trainees, school-based mentors and regional tutors complete detailed and well-focused annual evaluations that are analysed carefully and incisively. The response from all is overwhelmingly positive about all aspects of the programme.
21. Priorities for improvement clearly arise from self-evaluation and are focused on sustaining or improving the outcomes for trainees. Improvement plans take full account of the need to ensure that subject, and the overall, programmes are up to date. All current and anticipated developments in the subjects, as well as wider educational developments, are fully considered and well planned for. The collegiate approach, with all senior and subject leaders involved in programme review and development, is a strength of the Open University model. Although improvement planning operates at the programme level, subject leaders constantly check to ensure that developments in the subject are covered and that tutors, in particular, know about them and can pass this on to the trainees. This is helped by the high quality twice-yearly meetings of tutors. The

development of the course is informed well by subject leaders' own highly relevant research.

22. The nature of the Open University programme means that the university is constantly working on how to ensure that course materials can be reviewed and updated in a timely and cost-effective way. This process has absolute clarity about the time scales for each type of course material: what is fundamental and generally unchanging through to those aspects that need to change much more frequently. The university is currently undertaking a rigorous and fundamental review of the programme.
23. The university collects and analyses carefully extensive data on trainees' retention, progress and achievement, final attainment and future employment. The flexible nature of the course results in inherent difficulties in analysing the outcomes for cohorts of trainees and in identifying trends. The university is now considering how to monitor more closely the impact of changes to the course on particular aspects of trainees' performance.

Summary of inspection grades¹

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding; grade 2 is good; grade 3 is satisfactory; grade 4 is inadequate.

Overall effectiveness

How effective is the provision in securing high quality outcomes for trainees?		1
Trainees' attainment	How well do trainees attain?	2
Factors contributing to trainees' attainment	To what extent do recruitment / selection arrangements support high quality outcomes?	1
	To what extent does the training and assessment ensure that all trainees progress to fulfil their potential given their ability and starting points?	1
	To what extent are available resources used effectively and efficiently?	1
The quality of the provision	To what extent is the provision across the partnership of consistently high quality?	1
Promoting equalities and diversity	To what extent does the provision promote equality of opportunity, value diversity and eliminate harassment and unlawful discrimination?	1

Capacity to improve further and/or sustain high quality

To what extent do the leadership and management at all levels have the capacity to secure further improvements and/or to sustain high quality outcomes?		1
How effectively does the management at all levels assess performance in order to improve or sustain high quality?		1
How well does the leadership at all levels anticipate change, and prepare for and respond to national and local initiatives?		1
How effectively does the provider plan and take action for improvement?		1

¹ The criteria for making these graded judgements are in the *Grade criteria for the inspection of ITE 2008-11*; Ofsted November 2009; Reference no: 080128.

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