



Further Education Teacher Training

Staffordshire University

Beaconside
Stafford
ST18 0AD

Inspection report
2005/06

Managing Inspector:
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The inspection

1. This inspection was carried out 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 conducted in two phases by a team consisting of two of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI), an inspector from the Adult Learning Inspectorate and two additional inspectors. The inspectors visited the university and two of the partner colleges. Specialist additional inspectors assisted with visits to observe trainees' teaching. Inspectors focused on the quality of training and management and quality assurance procedures during the first phase of the inspection, which took place in November 2005. During the second phase, inspectors concentrated upon evaluating the achievements of the trainees through observing their teaching and evaluating their planning, assessment and coursework. Phase two of the inspection was completed in July 2006.

Background

3. Staffordshire University is a new provider of teacher education both for schoolteachers and for lecturers in further education. Its further education teacher training (FETT) provision is in its second year of operation. The provision is led by the Head of Education in the Faculty of Business and Law. The FETT provision is taught in six linked colleges.
4. The provision is all in-service part-time provision, principally for trainees in employment at the constituent colleges. Both postgraduate certificate of education (PGCE) and certificate of education (Cert Ed) courses are offered. Much of the teaching is carried out jointly to both Cert Ed and PGCE trainees. The courses are two years in length. The starting points for trainees are flexible. In the two colleges visited there were 67 trainees on the Cert Ed course and 44 on the PGCE.

Effectiveness of provision

5. The overall quality of provision is good (grade 2). Trainees demonstrate a strong commitment to their professional role and development. They show effective skills in lesson planning and make use of a wide range of teaching strategies appropriate to their students. They have a good knowledge of assessment methodologies appropriate to their teaching and apply these successfully. However, not all trainees fully support their students in developing their language, literacy and numeracy skills. Management and quality assurance procedures are rigorous in relation to trainees' written assignments. The assessment of trainees' teaching in the workplace is assessed when assignments are submitted and this process too is robust. Trainees experience good training by specialist teacher trainers but there is, as yet, more variability across the colleges in the support they

receive from subject-based mentors. The university is fully committed to the improvement of its provision and of making the best use of innovative practice.

Key strengths

Inspectors identified the following strengths:

- high calibre of trainees who have widened their approaches to teaching and learning as a consequence of the courses
- good planning and highly effective teaching by most trainees
- good course structures with prominence given to subject specific training and assessment
- high quality of training sessions in which teacher trainers use of a wide range of teaching activities and styles
- constructive tutorial support based upon the identification of trainees' individual needs
- rigorous assessment of trainees' written work and their teaching competence
- strong commitment by the university to improvement and the development of innovative practice.

Areas for attention

The partnership should address:

- limited support by some trainees of their students' Skills for Life development
- variability in the quality of mentor support, which does not enable consistency in the development of subject-specific skills
- limited quantity and quality of the written feedback on assignments and the delay in its return to trainees
- insufficient breadth of teaching experience of a small number of trainees

- insufficient monitoring of the implementation of policies on equal opportunities and the promotion of good race relations.

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

Achievement of trainees

6. Almost all the trainees visited showed significant commitment to raising students' achievements. They employ specific teaching and learning strategies to involve their students in a wide range of learning experiences and they set challenging learning targets. Trainees are able to improve their own teaching by effective self evaluation and by response to criticism. This is evidenced both in their post-lesson analysis and review and coursework files and is endorsed by their teacher trainers and mentors. Occasionally they find it harder to use ideas for improvement in a real sense. Trainees show good knowledge of their own capabilities as learners which informs their planning and delivery of lessons. For the most part they are willing to try new ideas and approaches. Their assignments are of a good standard and show a good level of reflection on professional issues.

7. Trainees are generally proactive in seeking professional development, support and guidance from colleagues within the settings in which they work. Occasionally opportunities have been missed: for example one trainee missed good opportunities to develop his numeracy skills. Their teacher trainers and mentors report a high degree of enthusiasm and commitment to their own development of professional skills. Very rarely there is a poor commitment to the professional role. In such situations trainees are not proactive in seeking support and assignments do not demonstrate progress.

8. Many trainees start their courses with a strong background in vocational skills and knowledge. About half those visited had developed their subject or vocational knowledge and skills. Trainees have also successfully developed their pedagogical skills and broadened the range of teaching strategies which they use. This has been particularly the case with trainees who are 'Skills for Life' (SfL) specialists. Other trainees are not always fully confident in developing SfL with the students for whom they have responsibility.

9. The planning of lessons and schemes of work is diligent and detailed. It includes the detailed analysis of the organisation of a lesson and the activities students will carry out. Learning outcomes and details of activities are included and are usually shared with students. Good attention is generally paid by trainees to how they will address the diverse learning needs of their students. For example, appropriate account is taken of learning support needs including dyslexia and hearing impairment. Occasionally the planning does not maximise the learning potential of the class.

10. Most trainees make effective use of a good range of teaching and learning strategies and resources, which they have designed or adapted, to suit specific students' needs, including methods which promote student independence and autonomy. To varying degrees use is made of e-learning as a learning resource. Occasionally planning allows too little student autonomy. Most trainees have developed expertise in a broad range of classes but occasionally trainees' teaching is, for example, mainly of very small groups and the widening of strategies for larger groups presents some challenge.

11. In most settings trainees are able to organise and manage their classes confidently and safely. Some are less effective in designing and managing strategies which will fully support a minority of students in their classes, including challenging younger students, less experienced students and faster students.

12. All trainees are able to devise or use appropriate methods of assessment and have a sound understanding of the theory underlying assessment. However, the range of assessment work done varies very considerably and depends upon the teaching trainees have to do. Trainees' formal methods of assessment range from task based methods to written coursework. There is good assessment of vocational skills. The best trainees use a range of informal methods successfully. Marking of written work is sound. Trainees make substantial use of assessment to aid students' learning and progress.

13. The majority of trainees ensure that their students make expected progress in their learning, for example through the setting of targets and the use of individual learning plans.

Quality of training

14. The structure and content of both the PGCE and the Cert of Ed courses have been planned to meet the FENTO standards and the minimum core curriculum of language, literacy and numeracy. The programmes are mapped closely to the standards and the documentation is comprehensive and informative. The programmes provide opportunities for trainees to develop their personal skills in numeracy and literacy. A distinctive and strong feature of the provision is the subject specific module studied in each year. The planning of the sequence of modules is helpful to the development of trainees' knowledge skills and understanding.

15. A strength is the focus on specific subject methodology which is normally supported by a subject mentor. In addition, the university hosts an annual summer school at which trainees are provided with opportunities to share practice with fellow subject specialists from all the partner colleges.

16. Assignments contribute positively to the training. Documentation of expected achievement is made clear for each assignment and they are phased suitably throughout the training. During the year trainees undergo four formal lesson observations by teacher training staff and they are also observed several times by their mentor. Trainees also have to develop a teaching file providing evidence of the practical aspects of managing learning over the two years of their course.

17. The implementation of the planned programmes is good. The programmes benefit from the expertise of experienced teams of teacher trainers. There is effective communication between the different teacher trainers leading to progression and continuity in the teaching on the courses. The pass and retention rates are good.

18. Training sessions are characterised by knowledgeable and confident teaching. The differing needs of trainees are met through the availability of a variety of training activities which are selected according to trainees' stage of professional development. The best sessions are well planned, have appropriate range of activities and make good use of information technology. Teacher trainers provide good role models, although they do not always share and evaluate with trainees the effectiveness of strategies they have employed during the session.

19. In one of the colleges an assessed observation of a trainee's teaching was seen. This incorporated helpful advice on generic teaching strategies and provided good feedback on targets which had been previously set. A strength of the support arrangements was that there was some immediate but brief feedback supplemented by a full and extended feedback tutorial at a later date.

20. There are good formal analyses of trainees' areas of prior attainment and areas in need of development. Very strong efforts are made to provide good individual support right from the initial assessment at interview. A significant number of trainees have received suitable support to help them with their academic writing. However, the development of trainees' personal skills with respect to the minimum core is not always tracked or monitored.

21. Trainees report good experiences of their support by teacher trainers. The feedback trainees receive on their lesson observations is comprehensive, detailed and helpful. During individual tutorials, trainee development targets are set, reviewed and re-set via regular progress reviews. The systematic use of individual learning plans (ILPs) is not yet fully embedded, in that as yet not all plans show 'smart' targets, particularly with respect to development of specialist subject teaching skills.

22. The university has been keen to promote stronger support from mentors with a subject background similar to trainees as well as by teacher trainers. Mentoring takes place mainly on a voluntary or goodwill basis.

During the year considerable progress has been made in strengthening this element of provision. Mentor handbooks have been improved and the partnership has drawn attention to the importance of identifying subject-specific feedback and guidance within the documentation. Nevertheless, the support that trainees receive varies in quality. Often it is ideal but also sometimes poor. Issues raised in observations by mentor and tutor do not appear to be effectively followed up in trainee development planning. One college is usefully monitoring its mentoring and following up instances where mentors have not been trained.

23. The marking of assignments is carried out with care and thoroughness. However, the written feedback that trainees frequently receive is limited in quantity and quality. This is attributed to the somewhat complex system of benchmarking, standardisation and multiple marking. All referred scripts, credits, distinctions as well as a sample of 'passes' are double-marked and some marked again by university staff. Whilst this assures rigour in the assessment its consequence is that feedback to trainees is not timely. Tutor comments, on a cover sheet to the assignment, are sometimes of a general, holistic nature, without significant reference to the assessment criteria of the unit. In effect trainees may not receive feedback on one assignment, with indications of generic areas for improvement, before starting their next assignment.

24. The overall assessment arrangements are very secure. To pass it is necessary to be successful in all the assignments and to submit a comprehensive teaching file. Each assignment must include a lesson observation which has to be satisfactory. The assessment and conferment regulations conform to those of Staffordshire University and its procedures for undergraduate and postgraduate programmes. ITT teacher trainers have a clear understanding of their roles in assessing trainees. The standardisation of marking is good.

Management and quality assurance of provision

25. Interviews are carried out by the colleges and well documented returns are made to Staffordshire University which records the details of trainees and at an administrative level tracks their progress through the courses. The university also checks trainees' qualifications. Subject qualifications have to be at level 3 and qualifications in numeracy and literacy at level 2. The interviewing arrangements vary from college to college but are rigorous. They provide a good identification of the support needs of trainees. All trainees undertake an evaluation of the extent of their need of support in literacy and numeracy.

26. The information supplied to trainees before beginning the training meets their needs. Trainees are very clear about the assessment details of the courses and of the emphases in the modules. They are well-informed about their developmental needs. Taster events are used to introduce new

entrants to teacher training courses so that they appreciate the demands which will be placed on them. In both the colleges visited there are strong operational links between the human resources department, the support for continuous professional development and teacher training. These links support college staff in their progress towards FETT qualifications.

27. There is some variability in the promotion of equal opportunities and the efforts made to recruit trainees from minority ethnic and other under represented groups. In one of the colleges visited these aspects were a strength; particular efforts had been made to recruit Asian women. With this exception the partnership is at an early stage with regard to ways of using its data to monitor widening participation with a view to targeting recruitment. The percentage of trainees from minority ethnic groups is comparable with those in the catchment areas of the various colleges. The monitoring of the implementation of policies on equal opportunities and the promotion of good race relations is not yet a strong feature of the partnership.

28. The courses are well managed at both college and university level. As franchised programmes they have to meet general parameters defined for all franchised operations and, at the time of the inspection, work was in progress to strengthen the expectations on partners. The SVUK endorsement of the programmes is dependent on satisfactory monitoring by the university including annual data returns and monitoring visits. Communication within the partnership is good and the roles and responsibilities of the various partner staff are well understood. An important part of good communication is a series of liaison meetings which are interleaved with standardisation meetings. These have been used productively to review the content and structure, to standardise marking and to improve the provision generally. These meetings are well attended. The university is, therefore, not simply certificating and quality assuring the training. It is proactive in establishing a distinct rationale for its provision and in using such additional resources it can access to explore improved practice.

29. The university has appropriate staffing arrangements. The responsibility of the university Head of Education is delegated to an Award Tutor who has a very important proactive role in the partnership in advising, checking and supporting provision through a series of visits, meetings and observations. All the colleges, for example, have been visited to check on their resources, their diagnostic assessment procedures and their support for individual trainees. Staff teaching in college settings are well qualified to degree level and with many having or working towards a mentoring qualification. There is a productive team ethos with an effective sharing of good practice.

30. Accommodation and resources are generally good or very good. Rooms are dedicated to education, clean and well laid out, well equipped with a good range of teaching materials which support differentiated delivery strategies. E-learning resources are good, including electronic whiteboards

and data projectors which are used effectively. However not all students are able to access university intranet teaching and learning materials.

31. The quality assurance arrangements for the monitoring of the assessment of trainees' course work are systematic and robust. The university organises a series of standardisation meetings and the systems of double and triple marking are rigorous.

32. The principal method of internally checking classroom performance is through the requirement for each modular assignment to include the report of a successful observation of a session of classroom teaching. This process is good and gives a strong emphasis to the importance of successful classroom practice.

33. The external examiner is an experienced senior lecturer in another university with a background in FE and FETT. She acts effectively in reviewing a range of scripts and teaching files. She does not yet observe any trainees teach although this is planned for the future.

34. There is good identification of strengths and weaknesses which is carried out at several levels. Student surveys have systematically taken place module by module and a strong feature is the interweaving of module review meetings with standardisation meetings. This cycle of meetings is well attended and is valued by the members of the partnership. The more formal annual monitoring process is good. An appropriate action plan which is linked to those of the colleges is produced. Within the process a self-evaluation is written and this shows a strong understanding by the partnership leadership of the strengths and weaknesses of the provision.

35. The university has good quality assurance systems for monitoring training by the direct observation of sessions by the award tutor. The robustness of this approach has recently led to intervention in a third college to improve some identified shortcomings. Colleges speak highly of the way this role is carried out. However, due to sickness this level of visiting has been reduced in breadth this year and in 2005/06 the university has not monitored teaching practice through the joint observation of workplace sessions.

Appendix list of colleges

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

- Cannock College
- Newcastle College
- Stafford College
- Stoke-on-Trent College
- Tamworth and Lichfield College
- Walford and North Shropshire College