

# The Open University

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A secondary initial teacher training  
inspection report  
2007/08

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## Introduction

The Open University works in partnership with over 1000 schools to provide secondary initial teacher training courses in England and in the other countries of the United Kingdom. Of these, about 600 English schools were active in the partnership in the year of the inspection. The university offers professional graduate certificate in education courses for the 11-16 age range in mathematics, science, design and technology, modern foreign languages, geography and music. At the time of the inspection there were 469 trainees undergoing training in England.

## Context

The inspection was carried out by a team of inspectors in accordance with the *Ofsted Handbook for the Inspection of Initial Teacher Training (2005-2011)*.

This revised report combines the judgements from a short inspection of the provision and of the management and quality assurance arrangements in 2006/07, with the judgements from the scrutiny of further evidence submitted to Ofsted in February 2008.

Grades are awarded in accordance with the following scale

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

## Main inspection judgements

Quality of training: Grade 1

Management and quality assurance: Grade 1

## Key strengths

- the structure and the content of the training programme
- the outstanding quality of the course materials
- the flexible nature of training in meeting trainees' individual needs
- the rigour of selection, initial needs analysis and assessment
- the very effective management which supports good quality training and outcomes
- the effectiveness of the training and quality assurance carried out by university tutors
- the strong culture of course improvement maintained by subject leaders.

## The quality of training

1. The quality of training is outstanding. The structure and content of the programme are excellent. Six distinct, but closely related, thematic strands in the form of training modules underpin the course structure. They are studied at three levels with the starting level dependent on the initial needs analysis. The levels are developmental and are well conceived to promote clear progression in trainees' teaching and in meeting the Standards. Good coherence between the training modules and school experience is ensured by requiring trainees to complete appropriate modules before they start the school placement. The related portfolio which draws on the school experience has to be submitted for assessment within three weeks of the completion of the placement. These arrangements enable trainees to make clear links between the modules, school experience and assessment.
2. The online and printed materials and resources continue to be extremely comprehensive and exceptionally well designed. The textual material is up-to-date, innovative and of outstanding quality. Course CD ROMs are closely linked to the training modules and include extended clips from lessons taught by experienced teachers, with follow-up interviews and discussions with pupils. These materials help trainees reflect on and improve their own classroom practice. Such high quality resources and materials promote high quality training. In addition to the training materials, optional but recommended day schools for key generic and subject related areas provide a valuable enhancement to the training provision.
3. University tutors provide trainees with outstanding support during the period out of school, when trainees are working through the module material, and when they are in school. In school, trainees gain very good experience and are provided with at least good subject and pedagogic support from mentors and other teachers in the departments in which they work. The monitoring and support roles of the visiting university tutors as well as trainees' familiarity with the course requirements help to ensure that school staff are familiar with the Open University requirements.
4. By its very nature this flexible PGCE is highly responsive to individual needs. Indeed, many trainees would not have been able to undertake teacher training without such provision. Start dates are flexible. The very detailed and comprehensive initial needs analysis and subject auditing process and the subsequent development of individual training plans (ITP) are outstanding features of the programme and models of excellent practice. The ITP is reviewed regularly, takes account of trainees' progress and achievements, and is the means by which targets are set and suitable training activities identified.
5. There are very good procedures for monitoring trainees' progress towards meeting the Standards. University tutors and mentors regularly complete a range of comprehensive reviews about the progress trainees are making during the course and, in negotiation with trainees, set clear and well defined targets that are reviewed regularly. In addition, the online reports site is now fully developed and

provides a useful facility for university staff to maintain an overview of trainees' progress.

6. The assessment strategy is demanding. Assessment is thorough and accurate. Trainees are assessed against the Standards in a well structured and progressive manner as they move through their training. Tutors and mentors provide lesson evaluations that are critical and constructive, link clearly to the Standards and include clear targets for future improvement. Regular assignments ensure that trainees link their school-based experience effectively with the module material at each level. Feedback on assessed written work is excellent, providing trainees with clear analysis of their strengths, areas for development and how to improve their work.

## Management and quality assurance

7. The selection procedures are very effective. The interview arrangements are very rigorous: they include the completion of a wide range of tasks and assessments by the university and partner schools. Interviewers are suitably trained and supported by clear guidance and reporting forms. The process results in good quality trainees who meet the special demands of this distance learning course. The number of trainee withdrawals is comparable with those on other Open University routes and the course failure rate is very small.

8. The management of the provision is very effective and supports good quality training and outcomes. There is a strong team in the university with good leadership and management of all aspects of the programme, and with all subject leaders contributing to wider cross-subject matters. There have been a number of recent developments and minor changes in the staffing and provision and these have been managed well to maintain and improve good quality training. A more significant development leading to improvement has been the appointment of support tutors in some subjects.

9. The university pays very careful attention to the needs of individual trainees and their initial preparation for the course. This is exceptionally well managed and organised. Subject leaders make a systematic provisional assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of each accepted trainee and this provisional assessment helps to inform the level of needs analysis the trainees complete. This, in turn, determines trainees' entry points to the course and their subsequent targets. Trainees do not start the training until the extensive needs analysis process is complete. Once trainees are established on the course, the individual support they receive, notably from visiting tutors, and the tracking of their progress by subject leaders are outstanding features.

10. Good procedures are used to check potential school placements. Subject leaders have very good formal and informal awareness of the experience the schools

provide for trainees. Good review procedures are employed to ensure that information about partner schools is up-to-date.

11. There are strong procedures to ensure trainers have the knowledge, skills and understanding to discharge their roles successfully. Among these are the effective documentary support, the frequency of training of university tutors and the cascade system for briefing and training mentors. Training events have a high and improving level of attendance.

12. An outstanding range of quality assurance procedures supports the management of training. The key element in this is the scrutiny of school- based training by university tutors. Tutors themselves are monitored and weak practice is identified and remedied. Extensive use is made of joint observations and discussions of trainees' teaching. Any concerns are identified quickly and dealt with promptly and without fuss.

13. The internal and external moderation of the assessment of trainees is robust. Changes in the assessment guidance have led to an improvement in practice. There is a strong team of subject-specific external examiners and their reports have made an impact on the quality of training.

14. There is a very strong culture of course improvement maintained by subject leaders. All points raised in previous Ofsted inspections have been attended to and the university has been proactive in seeking further improvement. The previous system for evaluating the quality of provision, which led to an annual quality assurance report, was good. More recently, the university has developed systems for evaluating the quality of the provision and for strategic planning that make better use of quantitative data to inform how the course should improve.