

Report of a Survey

on

Teacher Education Partnerships

1998/99

**The School of Education
The University of Ulster**

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1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 During 1998/99, the Education and Training Inspectorate (Inspectorate) undertook the final year of a three- year survey of the effectiveness of partnership arrangements between higher education institutions (HEIs) providing teacher education courses, and a sample of schools which host student teachers on school experience.
- 1.2 The survey related directly to the introduction of changes to initial teacher training (ITT) which came into effect at the start of the 1996/97 academic year. A key feature of the new arrangements is the stronger emphasis placed on classroom experience, and the acquisition of key teaching competences. Formal responsibility for the courses remains with the HEIs, but it was recognised that the active interest, involvement and co-operation of schools would continue to be vital in enhancing and enriching the entire training process for each student teacher, particularly, but not exclusively, during periods of school placement.
- 1.3 This report contains the findings of the third and final year of the survey of the partnership arrangements managed by the School of Education, University of Ulster (UU) during 1998/99. To indicate the developments and the progress made over the three years of the survey, the report also includes references to some of the findings in the two previous years.
- 1.4 In 1998/99, the School of Education at UU provided a one year post-graduate course (PGCE secondary) on its campuses at Coleraine and Jordanstown, and a post-graduate course (PGCE primary) at Coleraine. The PGCE course for primary teachers commenced in 1998/99 and was not included in the survey. At Coleraine, post-primary teachers are trained in art and design, English with drama and media studies, geography, history and music. At Jordanstown, post-primary teachers are trained in home economics, physical education and technology and design.
- 1.5 In contrast with 1996/97, when each HEI produced its own partnership handbook for schools, a common partnership handbook - "Initial Teacher Education: Partnerships between Schools and the Higher Education Institutions" - was used by all HEIs in Northern Ireland during 1997/98 and 1998/99. Each HEI supplemented this common handbook with further material which was specific to the respective institution. The handbook was based on a model of partnership agreed by the Northern Ireland Teacher Education Committee (NITEC), and developed following discussions involving HEIs, serving teachers and professional organisations.
- 1.6 A team comprising eleven inspectors undertook the survey during each year of the three years. They held discussions with university tutors at Coleraine or at Jordanstown, and with school staff and student teachers in both grammar and secondary schools. Fifty-seven visits were made to schools over the three years of the survey; the majority of these were made during the second period of school placement in each year.

2. SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS

- 2.1 The partnership arrangements for initial teacher education between the School of Education and its partner schools have improved steadily during the three years of the survey.
- 2.2 Almost all of the student teachers displayed a good knowledge of the partnership arrangements in the final year of the survey.
- 2.3 In over three-quarters of the schools visited during 1998/99, the procedures used by the School of Education to inform its partner schools, and the co-ordination and liaison between the university and schools in implementing partnership arrangements, were good or better. The link tutor system introduced in 1998/99 generally works well.
- 2.4 Teachers in these partner schools display a sound understanding of the partnership model, and of the competences to be developed during the extended periods of school placement. They provide student teachers with a broad range of teaching experiences including opportunities to observe experienced teachers, and to teach collaboratively with experienced teachers.
- 2.5 The development within schools of whole-school issues is variable, and is seldom part of the planned programme of work for student teachers.
- 2.6 In 1998/99, during the university-based aspects of the PGCE programme, the students followed a structured programme to develop a range of appropriate skills in information and communication technology (ICT). In 1997/98 and 1998/99, the School of Education ran a successful pilot project using ICT to maintain contact with student teachers during periods of extended school experience.
- 2.7 The management of the development of competences in schools improved significantly during the period of the survey. It was good or better in just under three-quarters of the schools visited in 1998/99 compared with only half the schools in the previous two years. Heads of Departments (HODs) and teachers contribute significantly to the development of the student teachers' competences.
- 2.8 In each year of the survey, the more significant weaknesses in partnerships were found in those schools or subject departments in which the university rarely places students, or was using for the first time, or in schools with a recently appointed teacher-tutor or HOD. In these instances, the teachers had a poor understanding of the partnership model of initial teacher education, and there was a wide variation in the quality of the training and the support provided for student teachers.
- 2.9 The induction and support procedures in the university do not ensure that, when a school has accepted a student teacher for school experience, the support provided by the university matches the level of understanding of the competence model within the school or department.

- 2.10 In a quarter of the schools visited in 1998/99, the management of competences was less than satisfactory; university tutors and/or school staff often did not follow consistently the good practice detailed in the partnership handbook.

3. INFORMING SCHOOLS

- 3.1 In over three-quarters of the schools visited in 1998/99, the procedures used by the university to communicate with and disseminate relevant information to staff in its partner schools worked well. The procedures and documentation have improved steadily since 1996, and partnerships have grown stronger. The inconsistencies identified earlier in the survey have generally been removed. In schools, the senior managers, teacher-tutors, HODs and classroom teachers are now better informed about, and have a clearer understanding of, the partnership arrangements and the teaching competences. Poor planning of students' experiences occurs when key school staff do not receive relevant information before a student teacher commences a school placement; normally, this is due to late visits by either a university link tutor, a specialist university tutor or poor dissemination of information within schools.
- 3.2 The university provides each student teacher and partner school with a copy of the Northern Ireland (NI) HEIs' common handbook, UU's associated supplementary material, and a copy of the UU course handbook for students. The quality of this documentation is of a good standard. For example, the student course handbook produced by the School of Education has been updated each year, and details thoroughly the requirements, content and management of the course. It contains much useful information for student teachers and school staff about the competences to be developed during school experiences, and also details the competence criteria. The course handbook also includes sound advice on aspects of classroom observation, and the completion of classroom observation and progress reports. Copies of the proformas used by the university for formative profiling of students' competences and the career entry profile for newly qualified teachers (NQTs) are also included.
- 3.3 Two consecutive one-day conferences were hosted and organised by the School of Education during 1998/99 for teacher-tutors and HODs. These were successful in involving schools in discussions on the role of schools as partners in initial teacher education, the roles and responsibilities of teacher-tutors and HODs, the dissemination of information within schools, the development of classroom observation skills, and enhancing communication and partnership between the School of Education and schools through the use of ICT. Staff from the schools which participated in the conferences are now much better informed about the arrangements, and have a greater understanding of areas for improving initial teacher education.
- 3.4 The introduction, in 1998/99, of a link tutor system strengthened the communication with teacher-tutors, in particular, and also with principals. A university link tutor was assigned to a cluster of partner schools to discuss the general partnership arrangements for initial teacher education, and the responsibilities of all those involved. Appropriate partnership information, including a copy of the common NI HEI handbook, was left in each school by the link tutor for dissemination within the school.

- 3.5 To ensure that information arrives with those teachers most closely involved with the student teachers, namely the HOD and classroom teachers, the specialist university tutors, during their first visits to students on placement, give HODs an information pack which includes detailed information on course content, coursework assignments, suggested targets for the development of student competence during school placement, school-based projects, and the completion of lesson observation schedules and progress reports. During 1998/99, this information pack reduced significantly the weakness, identified earlier in the survey, of some teacher-tutors not distributing relevant information to either the HODs or classroom teachers.

4. CO-ORDINATION AND LIAISON

- 4.1 Co-ordination and liaison between the university and schools in implementing partnership arrangements were good or better in over three-quarters of the schools visited during 1998/99. This is a significant improvement, and contrasts with the findings from the survey during 1996/97 and 1997/98, when weaknesses outweighed strengths in half of the schools visited. The university responded well to earlier feedback that almost all school staff would like more discussion with the university tutors on their respective roles and responsibilities as partners in initial teacher education before the student teachers arrive in the schools for school experience.
- 4.2 This improvement is linked closely to the change in the university's induction procedures, the introduction of the link tutor system, and the sound contacts which the specialist tutors continue to maintain with HODs during visits to schools. Teacher-tutors found the link induction visits helpful in clarifying and agreeing the respective roles and responsibilities of staff in schools and the university as partners in initial teacher education. These induction sessions were planned to take place before student teachers start each of their extended periods of school experience. When implemented effectively, the teacher-tutors and HODs have a clearer understanding of their roles in planning students' experiences, providing specialist subject and pastoral support, and assessing student performance.
- 4.3 In 1997/98 and 1998/99, the university ran a successful pilot project using ICT to maintain contact with students during periods of extended school experience. Staff and students in the pilot schools were able to communicate electronically with university tutors and with all pilot schools. Co-ordination and liaison were excellent in these schools. Features included speedy and relevant responses from university tutors to questions from students and school staff, and a useful interaction and sharing of ideas between student teachers in different schools. In particular, individual students shared discipline problems they were having with some classes or individual pupils.
- 4.4 Working relationships between school and university staff are generally good or excellent. A minority of teacher-tutors still report that they are not informed about planned progress visits to students and, consequently, are unable to meet and hold discussions with university specialist tutors. University specialist tutors report that timetabling constraints make it very difficult to synchronise progress visits at times when all key partners in schools are available during the normal school day.

- 4.5 In each year of the survey, the more significant weaknesses in co-ordination and liaison were in those schools or departments in which the university either places students infrequently, or was using for the first time, or in schools with a recently appointed teacher-tutor or HOD. In these circumstances, school staff often display a poor understanding of the partnership arrangements, of their roles in initial teacher education, and of the details of the key competences and where these competences are best developed. A lack of planned dissemination of information and discussion within schools and between school staff contributes to this poor understanding of partnership roles and responsibilities. The induction and support procedures in the university do not ensure that, when a school has accepted a student teacher for an extended period of school experience, the support provided by the university matches the level of understanding of the competence model within the school or department.

5. STAFF IN SCHOOLS

- 5.1 In three-quarters of the schools visited during 1998/99, the staff in schools displayed a satisfactory or better understanding of the partnership model, and of the competences to be developed during school placements. During the three years of the survey, there was a marked improvement in this level of understanding especially among teacher-tutors.
- 5.2 In 1998/99, most teacher-tutors, HODs and classroom teachers worked diligently to provide professional support for the student teachers. The advice and information imparted by the School of Education's specialist tutors to school staff during visits to students continue to provide them with useful staff development on issues such as classroom observation, structured feedback on student performance, and the assessment of teaching competences. Teacher-tutors and HODs who attended the one-day conference appreciated the opportunity to discuss openly with university tutors, the practical issues associated with initial teacher education. They find it helpful when the university specialist tutor plans for and allocates sufficient time during progress visits to discuss the work of the student teacher with them, and also with the student. Feedback sessions are particularly beneficial to teachers. Progress visits, when undertaken regularly and conducted in this way, gradually improve the partnership links between the university and a school.
- 5.3 In one-quarter of the schools, the staff have a poor understanding of the partnership model and, as a result, there is a wide variation in the quality of the training and support provided for students. Weaknesses in these schools vary; they include a lack of commitment by principals to the partnership model, ineffective dissemination procedures within the school, lack of planned staff development, and student teachers working with poor classroom practitioners. The UU tutors and the senior management in all schools needs to ensure that HODs and classroom teachers with whom students are placed can provide effective training and support.

6. STUDENTS

- 6.1 In 1998/99, almost all of the students displayed a sound knowledge of the partnership arrangements between the university and the schools. The knowledge and understanding which they gain in the university about partnerships are enhanced greatly during their extended periods of school experience through further discussions with university tutors, HODs and classroom teachers. They understand clearly which teaching competences are developed best in school, and the need for a broadly-based training programme in school to ensure that all the competence criteria are met. Students are fully aware that university tutors consult with teacher-tutors, HODs and classroom teachers, and that the school provides progress reports on their performance. Almost all students search out and receive satisfactory or good support from the classroom teachers during their time in schools.
- 6.2 In each year of the survey, almost all of the students reported that they were satisfied with the training experiences they receive in schools, and with the support provided by university tutors and school staff. They worked closely with HODs and class teachers, and their relationships with them were generally good.
- 6.3 In the best practice, teacher-tutors and HODs ensure that student teachers work with a number of teachers, are challenged to work with a range of classes and experience a sample of cross-curricular activities. In 1998/99, just over three-quarters of the schools visited provided student teachers with a broad range of teaching experiences including good opportunities to observe and to teach collaboratively with experienced classroom teachers. In the university-based aspects of the PGCE programme, students are introduced to, and are given assignments related to, whole-school developments such as the school improvement programme, the special educational needs of pupils, and pastoral care within schools.
- 6.4 The development within schools of these whole-school issues is variable, and is seldom part of the planned programme of work for student teachers. Most students gain useful experience in working with pupils during extra-curricular programmes; this helps them develop a deeper understanding of the value of such activities for the personal and social development of pupils.
- 6.5 In 1998/99, during the university-based aspects of the PGCE programme, the students followed a structured programme to develop a range of appropriate skills in ICT. A number of them applied these skills to good effect during school placements, particularly those in the schools participating in the two-year pilot of ICT. Students with high levels of computer literacy are often asked by HODs, during the second period of extended school experience, to develop lessons in their specialist subject area which require pupils to use ICT.
- 6.6 Many of the students benefit from the optional school-based project which is undertaken by most of them during the last four weeks of the course. It provides a helpful bridge to the subsequent induction phase of teacher education when whole-school issues are dealt with in more depth. The project produced best results when the aims and objectives were agreed clearly between the student and the school staff, were linked to classroom experiences, and related to the needs of the school. Students teachers of technology and design benefit from a design and

build project in the university during the last four weeks of the course; this project is compulsory before they commence their induction phase.

7. MANAGING THE DEVELOPMENT OF COMPETENCES

- 7.1 In three-quarters of the schools visited in 1998/99, the management of the development of competences was good or better. This represents significant progress in the effectiveness of the partnership arrangements which have developed during the three years of the survey. Principals, teacher-tutors and HODs in most of the schools visited in 1998/99 were well informed about the general changes in initial teacher education in Northern Ireland, and there is a general willingness within most schools to adopt a more structured approach to observing and commenting on students' work, and to developing students' competences.
- 7.2 The partnership arrangements have been greatly strengthened by the introduction by the university of a linked tutor system with all partner schools in 1998/99. Its implementation has contributed significantly to addressing weaknesses identified earlier in the survey; it has improved the contact and discussion between university tutors and relevant school staff, particularly teacher-tutors. Consequently, during 1998/99, in most schools the university tutors and school staff had a shared view on how the development and assessment of competences were to be managed.
- 7.3 HODs and teachers contribute significantly to the development of the student teachers' competences. Most use systematically the classroom observation schedule provided by the School of Education, and are willing to extend its use when requested to do so by university tutors. Most HODs are keen to play a more active role in the detailed discussion of the performance of student teachers with teacher-tutors, and with university specialist tutors. A significant number of classroom teachers also discuss privately with student teachers any comments the teacher has made on the observation schedule. Students express appreciation of this regular support from HODs and teachers as they work towards meeting the competence criteria. HODs find the classroom observation schedules helpful when preparing final school reports on the performance of the students. By completing the observation schedules and the final school report, which link aspects of teacher competence, HODs are continually reinforcing their understanding of the meaning of the competence statements in the NI HEI common handbook. In turn, the completed observation schedules by classroom teachers and university specialist tutors, and the final reports by HODs, enable the university specialist tutors to produce supportive formative profile reports on the progress of the students after each period of extended school experience. A feature of all of these formative assessment processes is the close involvement of the student; she/he countersigns each observation schedule, progress report and formative profile report.
- 7.4 In the schools visited in 1998/99 where the management of competences was less than satisfactory, the weaknesses identified earlier in the survey were still present. University tutors and/or school staff did not follow consistently the good practice detailed in the partnership arrangements. For example, during progress visits in three schools, the university specialist tutor did not provide support and advice to teachers about the completion of observation

schedules, and spent too little time in the school to discuss findings in sufficient depth with the student teachers and the school staff. This is unsatisfactory since students find the oral feedbacks to be informative and constructive, particularly when shared with the relevant school staff. In some other schools, where the link visits were delayed and students were already in the schools, the teacher-tutors and HODs had not been adequately informed about the partnership arrangements, and this resulted in poor planning of the school programme of work, and a degree of ill feeling within the school.

- 7.5 All students who succeed on the PGCE course receive a career-entry profile report which includes a summative assessment by the university of their progress in each of the teacher competences, and helps inform the beginning teacher and employing school of the teacher's strengths and development needs during the induction phase of training.
- 7.6 The university has quality assurance procedures in place which are generally effective. The course team and the PGCE (secondary) advisory group on partnerships meet regularly to evaluate and improve the course. The composition of this advisory group is broad and includes representatives from schools, the area boards, the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools and all the university tutors involved in the course. The school principals in this group make an important contribution indicating regularly how initial teacher education partnerships are working in their schools, and suggesting possible improvements. The university procedures for collecting and analysing the views of student teachers about their initial teacher education experiences are particularly effective in identifying areas of weakness which need to be addressed. In 1998/99, to build on the excellent feedback from students, the university sought the views of all partner schools on the effectiveness of the partnership arrangements.

8. CONCLUSION

- 8.1 The partnership arrangements for initial teacher education between the School of Education at UU and its partner schools have improved significantly since the first year of the survey in 1996/97. Staff in the university and in the schools have worked hard, and together have improved the quality of early teacher education both in the university and in its partner schools. The arrangements which are now in place, when thoroughly and consistently implemented, should ensure that all partner schools play an effective role in the initial training of student teachers.
- 8.2 Weaknesses in the partnership arrangements are found largely when a school or a department, or individual staff member within a school are involved for the first time in the new competence model of teacher education. In these circumstances, the university's induction and support arrangements often fail to provide enough time for appropriate staff development, and the dissemination of relevant information within the school. As a result, when a student teacher arrives at the school, there is a lack of an agreed programme of work for the student, and a poor understanding within the school of the new competence model of teacher education.

- 8.3 The quality of the teaching of newly-qualified teachers (NQTs) graduating from the School of Education, UU is generally high. The NQTs' ability in the classroom is due, in large measure, to the quality of their school experience as students, and is a tribute to the commendable efforts made by the School of Education and its partner schools to improve significantly the HEI/school partnership arrangements during the course of this three-year survey.

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