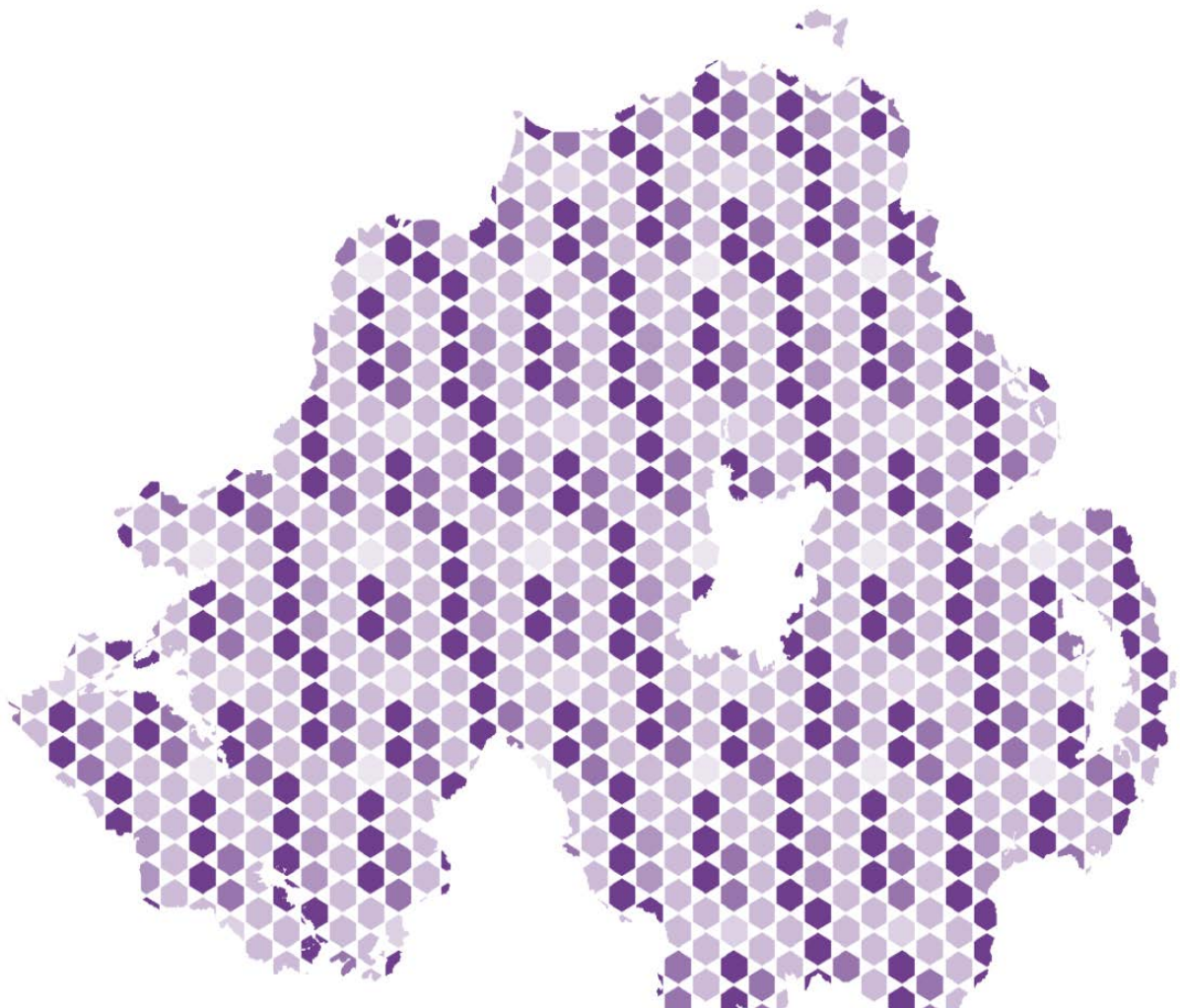


TEACHER/HIGHER EDUCATION INSPECTION



Education and Training
Inspectorate

An Evaluation of the Joint Post-Primary
'Post Graduate Certificate in Education:
Main Subject with Special Education and
Inclusion (PGCE with SEN and Inclusion)'
by Queen's University Belfast and
University of Ulster

2011-2012



Providing Inspection Services for

Department of Education
Department for Employment and Learning
Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure



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In this report, proportions may be described as percentages, common fractions and in more general quantitative terms. Where more general terms are used, they should be interpreted as follows:

Almost/nearly all	-	more than 90%
Most	-	75%-90%
A majority	-	50%-74%
A significant minority	-	30%-49%
A minority	-	10%-29%
Very few/a small number	-	less than 10%

Glossary

PGCE	Post-Graduate Certificate in Education
QUB	Queen's University Belfast
UU	University of Ulster
DE	Department of Education
ETI	Education and Training Inspectorate
SEN	Special educational needs

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 The review of Special Educational Needs and Inclusion has highlighted the need for teachers to have increased skills and knowledge to deal with the needs of those pupils who display greater difficulties in learning and understanding than their peers. In response, QUB and UU submitted a joint proposal to DE seeking funding to pilot a special educational needs and inclusion elective within their PGCE post-primary programme.

1.2 The pilot and its outcomes are very timely given the strong emphasis being placed across the Member States of the European Union on the development of an inclusive approach to teaching in schools and, in particular to the important role of initial teacher education in preparing the “inclusive teacher” who is able to address effectively the wide range of learners’ needs in mainstream classrooms. The European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education has recently published a *Profile of Inclusive Teachers*¹ which sets out the competences required. Northern Ireland played a full part in the development of the profile which is reflected well in the General Teaching Council for Northern Ireland’s *Teaching Competences*² which underpin all teacher education here.

1.3 The pilot proposal was successful and extended over 2010-2012, with a focus on post-primary PGCE in Main subject with a Special Educational Needs and Inclusion elective module. The pilot is aimed at developing practical skills and strategies of post-primary student teachers for meeting the diversity of needs in the classroom.

1.4 The DE commissioned the Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) to carry out an evaluation of the pilot by June 2012, that is, after the second time the course had run.

2. AIMS OF THE PILOT

2.1 The overall objective of the pilot is to enhance the PGCE student teachers’ knowledge, understanding and skills in relation to teaching pupils identified as having a wide range of additional needs. There are a number of additional areas which each university is expected to demonstrate:

- the student teachers’ ability to make an assessment of what learners do best and find difficult, and plan a programme of learning and teaching to address these needs within a large class;
- the student teachers’ understanding of the importance of developing the pupils’ self-awareness and their ability to review and critique their own learning and progress;
- a strong focus on literacy and, in particular, on the language of learning within the student teachers’ specialist area; and
- the development of a range of practical teaching and learning strategies.

¹ Four core values relating to teaching and learning have been identified as the basis for the work of all teachers in inclusive education. These four core values are:

1. Valuing learner diversity – learner difference is considered as a resource and an asset to education;
2. Supporting all learners - teachers have high expectations for all learners’ achievements;
3. Working with others - collaboration and teamwork are essential approaches for all teachers;
4. Continuing personal professional development - teaching is a learning activity and teachers take responsibility for their own lifelong learning.

<http://www.european-agency.org/agency-projects/teacher-education-for-inclusion/teacher-education-for-inclusion>

² *Teaching: the Reflective Profession*, General Teaching Council, Northern Ireland, 2004

2.2 In addition, it is recommended that the pilot provides:

- specific opportunities to look at some case studies and samples of work from pupils with learning difficulties; and
- specific opportunities in which the QUB and UU student teachers will come together for learning sessions – both face-to face and on-line.

2.3 The pilot approval also indicated the need for the two co-ordinating lecturers (project managers) to consider the legacy of the programme in supporting SEN and, in particular, how elements of the programme could permeate the other initial teacher education courses provided by the universities.

3. METHODOLOGY

Scope and Method of the Evaluation

3.1 The evaluation of the pilot programme focused on the aims and recommendations as set out in the agreed conditions of the letter of acceptance of 30 September 2010. The inspection approach which guides the evaluation was discussed with the project managers and account was taken of the universities interim evaluations in the overall quality assurance process. The inspection and the findings reported take account of the quality framework for the self-evaluation and inspection of initial teacher education³.

3.2 The inspectors paid particular attention to the views of the student teachers. The evaluation also included a short questionnaire which the student teachers completed on-line.

3.3 The arrangements for the inspection included:

- ongoing meetings with the two project managers;
- the scrutiny of the material and samples of the student teachers' work;
- meetings with education staff of both universities;
- a review of the Post-Primary PGCE Partnership and SEN conference (April 2012);
- discussions with student teachers at the Post-Primary PGCE Partnership and SEN conference;
- interviews with a sample of school staff where the student teachers were on teaching placement; and
- observation of the student teachers undertaking teaching in special schools.

The inspectors appreciated the opportunities provided, over the pilot period, to engage in discussion and listen to presentations with university staff.

³ <http://www.etini.gov.uk/index/inspection-reports/inspection-reports-higher-education-initial-teacher-education/inspection-reports-higher-education-initial-teacher-education-2010/self-evaluation-and-inspection-of-initial-teacher-education-provision.pdf>

4. SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS

The project has achieved, to a high level, its key aims of improving the student teachers' knowledge, understanding and skills in relation to teaching pupils identified as having a wide range of SEN.

Strengths

- the student teachers demonstrate that they have developed well-considered and appropriate attitudes and values towards inclusive education;
- the student teachers have improved significantly their capacity to identify, plan for and address, through their teaching, the needs of pupils who have a wide range of learning differences;
- the level of interest and motivation generated by the programme is very high among the student teachers; they have demonstrated a capacity to work in whatever setting they choose with a commitment to enabling young people to overcome barriers to their learning;
- the strong focus on literacy through the Reading Partnership aspect of the programme has helped raise the participating pupils' literacy standards; and
- the case studies presented are of a good, and better, quality and are a testament to the confidence and increasing knowledge and skills deployed by the student teachers on their placements.

The effectiveness of leadership and management (in particular, the work of the project managers) in integrating approaches to subject teaching and inclusive learning and enhancing quality throughout the SEN elective is very good.

Strengths

- the developed programme has been successful in raising the profile of SEN among the lecturers and within the wider PGCE programme in both universities; and
- both of the project managers worked diligently over the period to ensure the programme focused purposefully on addressing the practical inclusion and SEN issues which the student teachers will meet in their future careers.

Areas for further development

Collaborative working across both institutions has not developed as well as it could have and much more is needed to ensure that the SEN module can be permeated effectively into all PGCE programmes.

The pilot has resulted in the identification of a number of aspects which require further development.

These include the need:

- to develop, more effectively, the collaborative approach to focus more actively on the benefits for both institutions and to embed the 'good practice' achieved so that the potential of the elective permeates appropriately the design, planning, teaching and assessment in all of the other PGCE modules;
- to maintain and develop the emphasis placed on literacy and consider a similar approach to numeracy while covering other important barriers to learning such as pupil dis-engagement, attendance, classroom management/behaviour and English as an additional language; and
- for the Higher Education Institutes, working in partnership with the Education and Library Boards and schools to consider the implication of the induction programme for beginning teachers to ensure that the inclusive competences developed during the PGCE programme are built upon in all mainstream settings.

Overall

In the aspects of the pilot inspected, both providers have met well the key objective of developing the practical skills and strategies of post-primary student teachers for meeting the diversity of learning needs in the classroom. The providers are meeting very effectively the needs of the student teachers and have demonstrated the capacity for sustained self-improvement.

5. THE FINDINGS IN DETAIL

5.1 THE STUDENT TEACHER POSITION

The one clear, common response from the student teachers' questionnaires was that the SEN elective represented 'good practice'. The programme was highly valued and in the student teachers' view, it built on their capacity to meet a wide range of SEN.

Of the 17 (of 20) student teachers who responded to the questionnaire:

- all felt better informed and reported that they were more attentive to SEN;
- all agreed that their views on inclusion had changed and they were more likely to 'reflect' on SEN, use 'SEN friendly language' in class and give greater energy to differentiated planning and teaching; all highlighted their interest in learning more about (different types of) SEN;
- the majority mentioned the need for more time to prepare for SEN work; and
- all would recommend the SEN elective to other student teachers.

An area worthy of further consideration is the 'Better Reading Partnership' activity. The training was reported as very useful and helped the student teachers in all aspects of planning for teaching and learning for all learners. While all highlighted the training as useful, the level of challenge it presented was evident. Time and the degree of paperwork involved were raised as major difficulties. Given the lessons arising from the pilot, both institutions might consider developing their own reading module drawing on best practice and key aspects arising from the case studies tasks, as an on line template for all PGCE students.

5.2 THE SCHOOLS' POSITION

This section draws together the findings from discussions with school staff by telephone and during visits to a sample of schools, and includes the views of the student teachers from cohort one together with a review of case study evidence.

Key benefits identified are:

- the schools appreciate the improved emphasis on SEN within the PGCE programme;
- the schools make good use of the student teachers' interest and developing skills in SEN;
- the schools are more likely to deploy the student teachers to support SEN work;
- the schools identified the need for a planned programme of induction which builds effectively upon the students' developing knowledge and skills; and
- the schools desire to see the elective extended and mainstreamed across all PGCE courses.

5.3 THE STRATEGIC POSITION

Perhaps the most significant finding for the purposes of the pilot is that the strategic position has improved, albeit modestly, in aspects of the level of SEN collaborative working between and within the universities. The project managers actively engaged in creating an inclusive programme, piloting and refining aspects throughout the period – both invested much time in discussing the content and reaching agreement on common approaches and variations. In contrast, the logistics and competing demands and PGCE course requirements were constant barriers which have constrained the development of a collaborative framework for further work. An important variable to bear in mind is the obvious emphasis required to ensure that the core subject knowledge coverage was maintained. This aspect of the work may have an impact on attempts to extend and mainstream the SEN module.

While the improvements in collaborative working at a strategic level are modest a number of significant elements are noteworthy:

- action planning in 2010-2011 helped to direct the first year's programme, and targets set were appropriate, including the additional extended placement in special schools/settings;

- the development of on-line SEN materials, including the CD of support resources for the 'Reading Partnership' programme, are a useful aspect of the elective which informed the student teachers about inclusion and provided a platform for shared and continued learning and reflection; both universities are now recognised as centres for the provision of National Open College Network accredited courses; the use of visiting relevant speakers with SEN knowledge and experience, enhanced current practices;
- the focus on literacy training and practical case studies shows a clear impact on capacity and skills development and the importance of more intensive training in a core area of need;
- the decision to provide additional teaching placement in an SEN context enhanced the student teachers' learning experiences;
- the shared, joint student teacher events and on-line discussion proved effective when they occurred but were infrequent; and
- beginning teachers' (those completing the elective in 2011) views on SEN show they have maintained their interest and confidence in SEN; just over one third of them are deployed specifically to support SEN work in their schools.

Developing the SEN resources and initiating practical training in the promotion of literacy emerged as the most important benefit to schools.

The key lessons arising from the project which relate to strategic and collaborative working are the need:

- for sustained commitment and action at a management level to progress joint working, particularly to draw on the best practice aspects of the collaborative working;
- to develop further and manage the use of the on-line SEN-related resources for all PGCE students; and
- to develop further the work on literacy, and to include work on numeracy, through further and wider consultation with other stakeholders.

6. CONCLUSION

6.1 The pilot project has much to commend it and has a number of strengths which reflect well the investment by DE. The overall conclusion of the inspection team is that the pilot has raised the profile of SEN in both universities' PGCE programme. The consideration ahead is to ensure that the achievements can be sustained and mainstreamed. The overall quality of the provision within the pilot is very good.

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