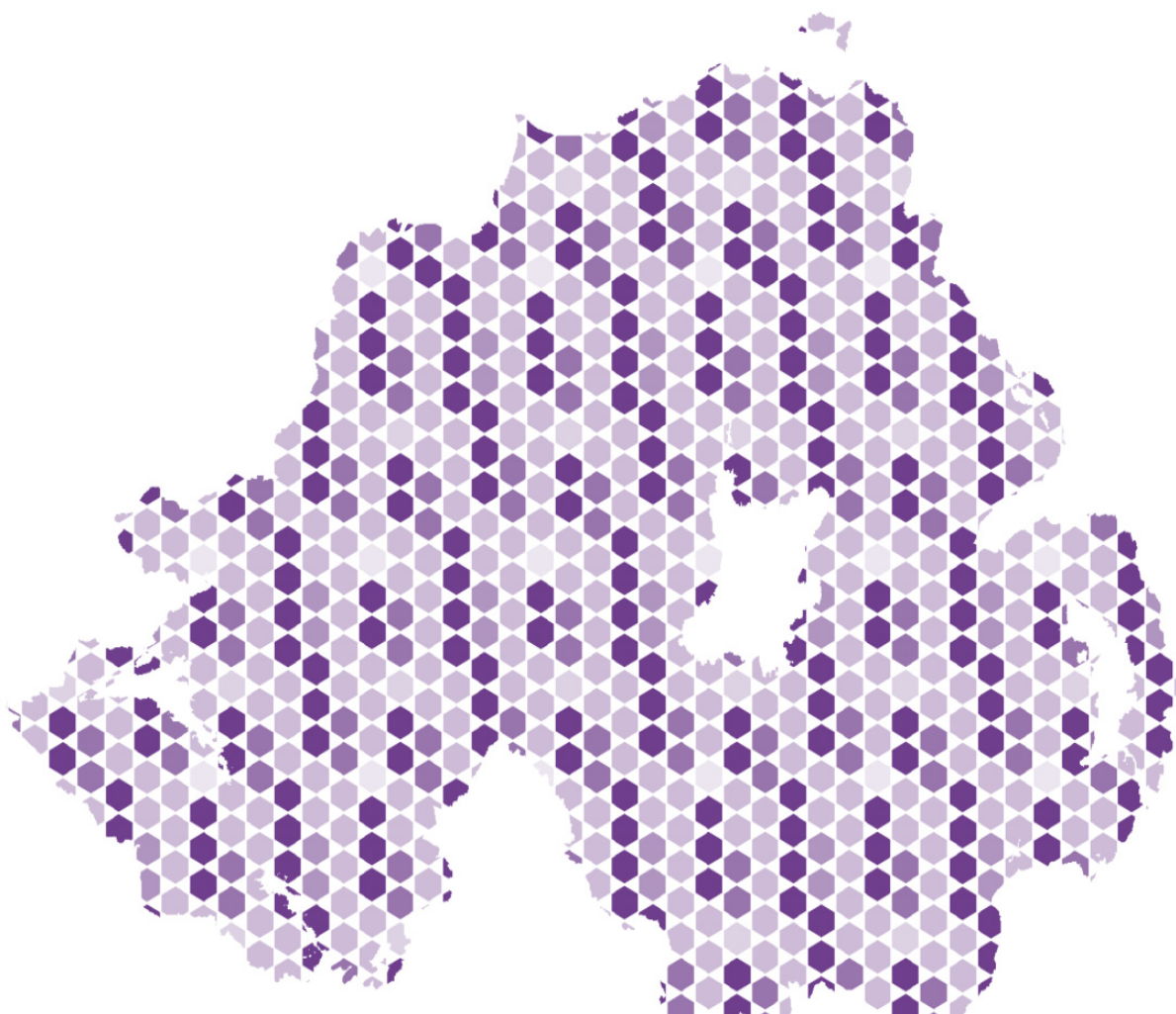


TEACHER/HIGHER EDUCATION INSPECTION



Education and Training
Inspectorate

An Inspection Report on the PGCE
Programmes, with a focus on
Literacy and Numeracy,
University of Ulster

Inspected: June 2010

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1. SELF-EVALUATION AND INSPECTION

1.1 The inspection of the Primary and the Post-primary Postgraduate Certificate of Education (PGCE) programmes provided by the University of Ulster's School of Education (School) was conducted within the terms of the Department of Education (DE) Circular 2010/03 *Initial Teacher Education: Approval of Programmes* which sets out the requirements which programmes must meet to be approved by DE. The provision is required by the Circular to be of a quality which is judged by Education and Training Inspectorate (Inspectorate) to be at least satisfactory. The inspection adopted a focus on literacy and numeracy across the curriculum of the programme. The choice of a curriculum focus was influenced by the draft strategy *Every School a Good School: a strategy for raising achievement in literacy and numeracy* (DE, Bangor, 2008). The document *Self-evaluation and inspection of initial teacher education provision, 2009-2010* (Inspectorate, July 2009) contains the framework of quality indicators employed for the inspection.

1.2 In advance of the visit, the School produced a self-evaluation (SE) report (a summary of which is contained in the Annex). In arriving at an evaluation of the levels of competence of student teachers, the School and the Inspectorate independently evaluated and reported on how well the student teachers are achieving and on the quality of provision for learning which, together, comprise a single summary performance level for the overall effectiveness of the provision (quality and outcomes). They also both evaluated and reported on the effectiveness of leadership and management, including the effectiveness of self-evaluation in securing improvement by raising achievement and enhancing quality. Lecturers were also invited to identify and describe briefly instances of effective practice which illustrate aspects of the self-evaluation and inspection framework. A selection of these is included in this report.

1.3 Finally, the School and the Inspectorate independently reported an overall level for the programme areas being assessed. In all cases, the evaluations relate to six performance levels which may be interpreted as follows:

PERFORMANCE LEVEL
Outstanding
Very Good
Good
Satisfactory
Inadequate
Unsatisfactory

2. THE EVIDENCE BASE

2.1 Throughout the academic year 2009-2010, a team of inspectors visited the School and observed 35 sessions taught by academic staff, ranging from lectures, seminars and practical workshops in specialist subjects, mixed-subject seminars, to presentations by students. The inspectors attended meetings; read policy, planning and evaluation documents; reviewed the resources, including the provision for online learning; and discussed samples of the students' work including assignments, school experience files and school-based projects with the students concerned. They visited 23 students during their school-based work placements, observed their teaching and, in most cases, the feedback sessions conducted by University staff.

2.2 The inspectors conducted over 20 significant discussions with staff which focused partly on their roles and responsibilities and partly on self-evaluation evidence produced for internal committees including Course Committees, Faculty Learning and Teaching Committee, External Examiner reports and the University's responses to them, Annual

Subject Monitoring groups, Revalidation Panel, Staff Student Consultative Committee, and externally, for bodies such as the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education, the Higher Education Statistics Agency and the Department for Employment and Learning. A formal discussion was held with a group of students in the University as well as with students in schools. The visits to schools also allowed for a range of informal talks with, for example, teacher-tutors, classroom teachers, co-ordinators, heads of department and principals.

2.3 In addition to specific sessions on literacy and numeracy, the embedding of literacy and numeracy across both the primary and post-primary programmes was also observed in a range of other contexts, such as sessions on curriculum and professional studies, foundation stage and key stages 1 and 2, and in all the post-primary PGCE courses.

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%

3. THE POSTGRADUATE CERTIFICATE OF EDUCATION (PGCE) PROGRAMMES AT THE UNIVERSITY OF ULSTER

3.1 The overall aim of the University of Ulster's PGCE Primary and Post-primary programmes is to foster the development of pedagogical competence in the following three areas:

- professional values and professional practice;
- professional knowledge and understanding; and
- professional skills and application.

3.2 The PGCE Primary programme and six of the Post-primary courses (Art and Design, English with Drama and Media Studies, Geography, History, Home Economics, Music and Religious Education) are delivered on the University's Coleraine campus. The remaining two Post-primary courses (Physical Education and Technology and Design) are delivered on the University's Jordanstown campus.

3.3 The PGCE programme consists of four modules addressing professional studies, curriculum and subject studies. Primary students undertake school experience at foundation stage, key stage (KS) 1 and KS 2, amounting to 18 weeks in total. Post-primary PGCE students spend a total of 24 weeks on school-based work.

3.4 The co-ordinators of the primary programme and each post-primary option support the students under their care very effectively when they are in the University and during their blocks of school-based work.

4. LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

4.1 The leadership of the PGCE programmes is located in the University's School of Education within the Faculty of Social Sciences. The current Head of School has only been in post since October 2009. She is ably supported by the Associate Head of School. The primary programme and the eight post-primary courses are each co-ordinated by a Course Director. All members of academic staff teaching on the PGCE programmes are on the PGCE Course Committee. The Associate Head of School and two Course Directors undertake leadership and course liaison responsibilities across the Jordanstown and Coleraine campuses. The University's structures for module and programme review are very clear and effective. The PGCE programmes were revalidated immediately prior to the inspection and the documentation prepared for that exercise was shared with the inspection team. The SE report produced in preparation for the inspection demonstrates that all staff engage in, and have a clear understanding of, the process of self-evaluation and the role they play in promoting continuous improvement of the University's PGCE provision. All members of staff have a clear vision for the development of the School's role in the future of teacher education.

The **Te-PNI** is a teacher e-portfolio project that allows student teachers and teachers to identify, plan, review and collaborate on learning through an easy-to-use set of secure web tools. Its concepts, principles and processes have been designed to let student teachers and teachers reflect on their learning by building a progressive record of development. The University of Ulster is the lead partner in this project and its partners, General Teaching Council for Northern Ireland (GTCNI), Regional Training Unit (RTU), Curriculum and Advisory Support Service (CASS), Queen's University Belfast (QUB), St Mary's University College, Stranmillis University College, Regional Support Centre for Northern Ireland (RSCNI) and C2K are working closely together to provide the best possible basis for an e-portfolio for all teachers.

4.2 The strengths of leadership and management include:

- the clear vision and commitment of all leaders for the development of the School's teacher education provision;
- the distributed leadership structures, and the strong sense of collegiality within the team delivering the PGCE programmes;
- the effectiveness of the University's structures to promote improvement;
- the commitment to extend and improve the partnerships with schools and other key stakeholders;
- the value schools see in the partnerships with the University;
- the use of colleagues from another subject area to monitor and evaluate the quality of marking.

4.3 Areas for further development include:

- the opportunity to address the willingness expressed by school leaders to develop further the quality of the partnership especially with respect to the promotion of literacy and numeracy; and
- the need to secure consistently the School's research capacity.

Overall, the effectiveness of leadership and management in securing improvement by raising achievement and enhancing quality is very good.

5. THE QUALITY OF PROVISION FOR LEARNING

5.1 The quality of the teaching by lecturers was very good or outstanding in most of the sessions observed. Working relationships between lecturers and students were excellent. Much of the teaching engages the students; they participated in high level discussion and debate on current educational issues; lecturers modelled good teaching practice; learning intentions were made clear; lecturers used skilful questioning techniques and challenged students to give more precise answers; and appropriate links were made between theory and practice.

The increasing use of **problem-based learning** (PBL) in professionally orientated programmes indicates that this approach offers opportunities to deepen students' learning and foster collaborative working practices. PBL units of study in the PGCE programme engage the students, in mixed subject seminar groups, to produce guidance for new and beginning teachers on the theme of classroom behaviour management. They work collaboratively to produce a unit of work for the revised curriculum in schools which details their own subject's contribution to learning, demonstrates cross-curricular interconnectedness and allows for assessment of learning against generic skills criteria. Each group of students presents their output to their peers in a general forum and benefits from their critique.

5.2 Aspects of the primary and post-primary programmes are very well integrated with each other and staff and students work effectively together, as far as possible, strengthening the cross-phase, interdisciplinary and cross-cultural experiences of the students. In both programmes there is an appropriate emphasis on the GTC [NI] teacher competences, and on discussion of relevant educational initiatives and developments. There is an effective focus on equipping students with the competences necessary to promote literacy and numeracy in their teaching across both programmes. There is an appropriate focus on supporting students to relate their practice to recent, relevant research evidence.

Sparkling the Imagination is a creative activity implemented by the student teachers with Foundation and Key Stage One pupils in seven primary schools in Belfast. The schools are located in communities identified as socio-economically disadvantaged areas. The aim of the 'Sparkling the Imagination' project is to co-ordinate, on a small scale, efforts made to improve educational opportunity for children from disadvantaged backgrounds by focusing on the context in which teaching and learning takes place. The activity improves the motivation and aspirations of all involved through the engagement of children, teachers, parents and creative experts in collaborative learning within the classroom.

5.3 A very small number of post-primary students take an Irish-medium enhancement programme in collaboration with St Mary's University College which includes undertaking the second module of school-based work in an Irish-medium post-primary setting.

The PGCE students are introduced to the work of the **Dissolving Boundaries** programme as an example of the innovative way that citizenship issues can be addressed through ICT and to offer an insight into the theory and practice of inter-cultural education. The programme enables schools in Northern Ireland (currently some 93 schools here) and the Republic of Ireland to work together online to give young people the opportunity of developing a better appreciation of each other through collaborative learning.

5.4 The strengths of the primary and post-primary PGCE programmes include:

- the integration of lecturers' research to inform the programmes which address effectively current educational priorities and support students to meet the needs of all children including those with special educational needs;
- the modelling of best practice by lecturers, particularly on the primary programme;
- the use of the teacher competences to contextualise assignments;
- the quality of most of the Mixed Seminar work which provided very good opportunities for meaningful group work and for students to engage in peer and self-evaluation;
- the quality of resources and the very effective use of LearningNI; and
- the quality of lecturers' marking and feedback, and the support they give to students while in the University and during school-based work.

5.5 An area for development is:

- the need to keep consistency and equity in the provision across the campuses under review.

SCHOOL-BASED WORK

5.6 The strengths of the school-based work include:

- the effective guidance given to students on Child Protection before they undertake any school-based work;
- the quality of the teaching by students observed which was mostly good or better;
- the thorough preparation by students for their teaching particularly in relation to literacy and numeracy;
- the general willingness of students to participate in wider professional, teaching-related and extra-curricular activities;
- the opportunities for students to avail of international experiences;
- the quality of the school-based projects;
- the effective support given by schools to students during school-based work;
- the commitment of schools to the partnership with the University.

5.7 Areas for development in relation to the school-based work include:

- the need to ensure consistency in the quality of feedback given to students by lecturers; and
- the need to provide explicit support for a number of students to improve the quality of their spoken English.

The quality of provision for learning including school-based work is very good.

The ***Lessons Today for Change Tomorrow Project***, now in its fourth year, is offered to student teachers on the Local and Global Citizenship Subsidiary course. Participants are chosen by a process of application and interview and must raise funds for their partnership schools. Whilst in Malawi, students spend several days teaching the Citizenship element of the Malawian Social Studies curriculum at two contrasting secondary schools in Zomba. They conclude the visit with a debriefing session in the Faculty of Education in Chancellor College, Zomba. They are required to write up the work as a collaborative School-Based Project (an element of the PGCE Coursework), make a presentation to their peers, and produce a notice board display within the School of Education.

6. ACHIEVEMENTS AND STANDARDS

6.1 There is a high demand for places on the University's PGCE programmes. Most successful applicants have 2.1 primary degrees or better. In addition, most of the successful applicants have studied education during their undergraduate programmes and have experience in educational settings before applying for a place on the programme.

The ***PGCE Drama performance*** showcases how Drama and a range of drama strategies can be used within all subject areas, to further improve on all children's communication and literacy skills within a classroom setting. The PGCE students work collaboratively to create an original devised script to perform to a real audience, comprised of the rest of their PGCE peers. The students are all actively involved in the performance which also improves their own communication and drama skills. Furthermore the students are able to practically demonstrate, model and disseminate good literacy practice to their peers by using explorative drama strategies to examine a number of common curriculum themes. All PGCE tutors use follow-up subject sessions to consider ways in which Drama may be used to support and aid children's literacy progression.

6.2 The strengths in relation to achievements and standards include:

- the commitment of students to the pastoral care of the learners;
- the clear understanding of almost all students of the teacher competences and their use of the competences to reflect on their own professional development;
- the effective response of students to the high expectations of staff;
- the depth of the understanding of almost all students of the promotion of literacy and numeracy;
- the understanding of students of current educational issues and priorities; and
- the evidence of a clear focus by students on learning outcomes in their reflections.

The quality of standards and achievements is very good.

Overall, the quality of provision for learning and the standards achieved by the students is very good.

7. CONCLUSION

7.1 In the areas inspected, the quality of the provision of teacher education (and self-evaluation) by this provider is judged by the Inspectorate to be very good. The provider is meeting very effectively the needs of the student teachers and has demonstrated its capacity for sustained self-improvement.

The overall quality of teacher education (and self-evaluation) across the PGCE programmes is very good.

SUMMARY OF SELF-EVALUATION OF THE PGCE BY THE UNIVERSITY OF ULSTER

ASSESSMENT OF PERFORMANCE

SECTION A

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement, supporting the student teachers and enhancing quality?

Main strengths:

- The University's commitment to Teacher Education remains strong.
- Highly qualified and experienced staff deliver across all sectors of Teacher Education.
- The distributed leadership frameworks of the University, the School of Education and of the PGCE course team support course administration, strategic development and enhancement.
- The PGCE has just passed through the institutional quality assurance process of Revalidation and has received the approval of internal and external assessors. The external panel members formed a singularly well qualified and experienced review panel.
- Annual Subject Monitoring provides for rigorous monitoring including an annual evaluation by External Examiners with Course Directors being required to respond formally to issues presented.
- Students are actively involved in the evaluation of all aspects of the programme and there exists a mandatory process for their perspective to be received and reviewed.
- Innovative and creative strategies are designed to strengthen and enhance partnership arrangements in relation to school-based student experience.

Areas for further development:

- Continual strengthening and further development of the partnership arrangements in support of students on school placements.
- Continuing involvement in the evolution and implementation of educational initiatives. Up-skilling of staff involved in all aspects of primary and post-primary teaching.
- The maintenance and further development of pedagogical research initiatives and projects in education.
- Tutors drawing upon their practitioner professional and research experience to enhance student learning.

Overall, the School of Education would describe its performance in this area as generally 'Very Good', while recognising that there are areas for improvement.

SECTIONS B AND C

How well do student teachers achieve and what is the quality of provision for learning?

Main strengths:

- The UU PGCE primary and post-primary programmes are continually oversubscribed with high-calibre graduates wishing to enter the teaching profession. Highly qualified and experienced teaching and research staff deliver across all sectors of Teacher Education and recognise the need to challenge students academically and pedagogically.
- Staff and facilities are provided by the university to support specialist teaching in a strong infrastructure in the Learning Resource Centres on each University campus and in a range of other specialist teaching environments in support of all teacher education programmes.
- The programme is underpinned by the professional values presented in guidance documents of the GTCNI.
- The programme is committed to education contributing to the vision of Northern Irish society as embraced in the *Shared Future* Agenda. A unique cross-community Religious Education provision, endorsed by all four main churches, for students wishing to teach RE in schools, is a key feature of both primary and post-primary programmes.
- The programme pedagogy is designed to foster an early and continuing commitment to critical reflective practice as a central philosophy for student teachers. Evidence for students embracing this self-evaluative ethos is reflected in assignments and postings on 'Learning NI' throughout the course. The use and penetration of ICT supports all aspects of the PGCE with 'Learning NI' as the major VLE learning support mechanism.
- Strong pastoral, learning support mechanisms as well as induction strategies and provision, including on-going (face-to-face and online) support for students with a range of pastoral and special needs with effective and efficient admissions, pastoral care and learning support mechanisms offered to students during the programme.
- Attainment, retention and employment statistics are impressive, and are monitored and recorded annually.

Areas for further development:

- To continue to embed an expanding understanding of the Northern Ireland Curriculum and to extend teacher education provision in the area of special and inclusive education.

- To continue to enhance active collaborative learning amongst student teachers and collaborative teaching across the various phases of teacher education programmes offered by the University engaging actively with the future development of teacher education in Northern Ireland while continuing to build on its distinctive strengths.
- The critical expansion of ICT in support of both student and pupil learning, in particular, fully and effectively to utilize both e-portfolios and Interactive Whiteboards.

Overall, the School of Education would describe its performance in student achievement and provision of learning as 'Very Good', with some features 'Outstanding', while recognising that there are areas for improvement.

OVERALL CONCLUSION

Overall the School of Education considers that performance in all categories is very good with examples provided of what could be categorised as outstanding alongside areas for further improvement.

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