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



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## **Education and Training Inspectorate**

### **Report of a Follow-up to a Survey**

**The Provision for Tutor Education within Essential Skills  
in the Queen's University Belfast, the Belfast Metropolitan  
College, the Northern Regional College and the  
North West Regional College**

**Inspected: October 2007-January 2008**

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A number of quantitative terms are used in the report. In percentages, the terms correspond as follows:

More than 90%	- almost/nearly all
75%-90%	- most
50%-74%	- a majority
30%-49%	- a significant minority
10%-29%	- a minority
Less than 10%	- very few/a small minority

## **SUMMARY**

### **1. BACKGROUND**

1.1 The essential skills strategy, “Essential Skills for Living: the Strategy and Action Plan for Adult Literacy in Northern Ireland”, published by the Department for Employment and Learning (the Department) in October 2002, had three main elements – a new curriculum, new accreditation for learners, and enhanced qualifications for those wishing to teach essential skills. The Strategy recognised the need for an improved tutor base to achieve the government’s objective of reducing the number of adults with literacy and numeracy difficulties. In the circular ES03/03, the Department advised that all new tutors of adult literacy and numeracy have, within their respective disciplines, at least a level 4 subject specialist qualification on the National Qualification’s Framework (NQF). Following a report by the Education and Training Inspectorate (Inspectorate) on the provision for tutor education by Queen’s University Belfast (QUB) in 2004, the Department advised that from September 2004 all new tutors should also hold a professional teaching qualification at level 4.

1.2 During 2003, the Department funded four organisations to provide tutor education courses, in addition to those already provided by QUB. Of these, three were Further Education (FE) colleges: the Belfast Institute of Further and Higher Education (BIFHE), the North East Institute of Further and Higher Education (NEIFHE) and the North West Institute of Further and Higher Education (NWIFHE).

### **2. PURPOSE OF THE SURVEY**

2.1 The aim of the follow-up survey was to assess the progress made by the tutor education providers in addressing the areas for improvement identified in the original reports: The Provision for Essential Skills in FE, Jobskills, New Deal and Community and Voluntary Provision funded by the Department (inspected May 2003-April 2004) and Report of a Survey on The Provision for Tutor Education within Essential Skills in the BIFHE, the NEIFHE, the NWIFHE and the Workers Education Association (inspected November 2004 to February 2005).

2.2 Since the publication of the original reports, the FE colleges have merged, and this report summarises the findings of a follow-up survey of the provision for tutor education in essential skills at QUB, and the courses franchised to the reconstituted colleges including the North West Regional College (NWRC), and the City and Guilds provision within the FE sector in two other colleges; the Belfast Metropolitan College (BMC), and the Northern Regional College (NRC).

2.3 The original surveys in 2003 and 2004 highlighted a number of strengths in the provision. These included the:

- good quality of the teaching;
- high level of commitment of the tutors and their support for the students;
- management of the taught element of the course;

- motivation of the students, their perseverance, high attendance and retention rates;
- satisfactory standard of the written assignments of the majority of the students;
- development of the majority of students' personal use of language and number; and
- breadth of the course.

2.4 The original surveys also identified the need for improvement in the following key areas in the QUB provision:

- the adequacy of the provision in view of the wide variation in the students' prior experience and achievements;
- the need for greater emphasis on the development of pedagogical and assessment skills specific to literacy and numeracy;
- the quality and management of the placement;
- the quality assurance procedures; and
- the use of information learning technology (ILT).

2.5 The main areas for improvement identified in the FE provision in the original survey were the:

- use of differentiated teaching approaches and levels of support to address the wide variety in the prior experience and achievements of the students;
- use of ILT within the teaching sessions by three of the providers;
- selection of, and preparation for, the teaching placements by three of the providers;
- students' understanding of the development of language and numeracy as reflected in their teaching practice;
- quality and management of the teaching placements;
- development, monitoring and evaluation of the mentoring arrangements for three of the providers; and
- quality assurance procedures for three of the providers.

### **3. PROVISION**

3.1 In the period 2005-2007, 323 student tutors were enrolled on the QUB, and the QUB franchised courses in tutor education in literacy and numeracy. Over the same period, 173 student tutors were enrolled on the City and Guilds provision through the FE sector.

3.2 At the time of the follow-up survey, the QUB has reviewed and rewritten its Certificate and Diploma course documentation, for the purpose of revalidation. The revised documents take account of the changing nature of tutor education and the part played by other key stakeholders, such as Lifelong Learning United Kingdom (LLUK), and level 5 specification requirements.

3.3 The range and experience of the current student tutors continue to be extremely wide in terms of their general education, their background qualifications, their experience of teaching and their range of teaching placements; a majority of the placements, at the time of the follow-up survey, no longer involve the teaching of adults but involve instead the teaching of sixteen to nineteen year olds in FE and training organisations.

### **4. THE EVALUATION**

4.1 During the follow-up survey evaluation, the Inspectorate observed nine taught sessions and 14 student tutor lessons in community, training organisations and FE colleges. Inspectors also examined student tutors' and essential skills learners' work, held discussions with course managers, mentors and learners. This report summarises the main findings from the follow-up survey evaluation.

### **5. SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS**

5.1 The main strengths are the:

- improved use of ILT in the taught sessions by one provider and the improved use of the opportunities afforded by the Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) to support learning by another provider;
- developing use of differentiated teaching approaches by two providers to address the wide variety in the prior experience and achievements of the literacy students;
- productive and effective collaboration facilitated by the work of the Numeracy Project between QUB, Learning and Skills Development Agency, Northern Ireland (LSDA(NI)) and the NWRC; and
- effective development of the small scale action research projects in the Diploma programme which supports the ongoing enhancement of the student tutors' pedagogical skills.

5.2 The main areas for improvement are the:

- need to ensure that each student tutor placement provides teaching and learning opportunities which reflect the classroom challenges of the full range of essential skills learners in addition to the adult cohorts;

- need to review the bridging course provision in numeracy to ensure that it adequately prepares student tutors to cope with the full range of numeracy demands of the programme;
- need to develop and support innovation in the use of ILT across the full range of the provision to ensure that student tutors are confident in the use of ILT on their programme and in their classroom practice;
- quality and management of the teaching placements for three of the providers;
- management of the selection and the role of the mentors; and
- quality assurance procedures and their demonstrable links to improvement.

## **OVERALL QUALITY OF PROVISION**

### **6. STANDARDS AND OUTCOMES**

6.1 Almost all of the student tutors are highly motivated and engage enthusiastically in their learning. However, within the QUB numeracy provision, it is evident that those who hold a level 2 qualification on entry continue to require significant additional support. Not all student tutors enrolled on the QUB numeracy provision were offered the bridging course which has resulted in a number who experience difficulties when they attempt to deal with the full range of numeracy demands of the programme.

6.2 Within the overall literacy provision, there was good evidence to support the effective development of the student tutors' understanding of language development, and of the ways in which adult learners use language in everyday life, in a wide variety of social and personal contexts. In the best practice observed, the student tutors had a good understanding of the relationship between theory and practice and were beginning to embed their theoretical understanding within their practice, more successfully.

6.3 Over the period 2005-2007, of the 496 student tutors who enrolled on the provision for tutor education in essential skills, 339 achieved the target qualification. This represents an achievement rate of 68%.

6.4 Within the Diploma programme at QUB, the small scale action research projects provide an excellent opportunity for the student tutors to explore current classroom challenges within essential skills and their related pedagogical considerations. Research topics undertaken by the student tutors included the motivation of essential skills learners in the Training for Success programme, and the impact of the development of oracy skills on the engagement in learning of trainees and apprentices. These projects are well managed by the university staff and provided good opportunities for well structured professional discussion, and useful possibilities for ongoing professional development.

6.5 Within the numeracy provision at QUB and NWRC there was good evidence of effective links to the developments in active learning resulting from the Numeracy Project and a minority of the tutors were observed using active learning to good effect in their placement.

### **7. THE QUALITY OF TEACHING AND LEARNING**

7.1 The tutors provide very good support for the student tutors and good relationships exist between the learners and their tutors.

7.2 The overall quality of the general teaching and learning across the institutions is good. The use of ILT in the provision at QUB has improved in the taught sessions in literacy, and is generally more developed in literacy than in numeracy. The QUB literacy tutor makes effective use of ILT for classroom teaching, preparation and administration. In one of the colleges, there was good use of the VLE to support teaching and learning, and staff made effective use of it to track student progress and assessment outcomes, and to post lecture

notes. However, the exploitation of the full range of ILT possibilities remains generally under-developed, and there were few examples of the use of innovative practices using new and emerging learning technologies. The exploitation of opportunities, through ILT, for synchronous and asynchronous learning, and the use of on-line innovations in teaching remain significantly underdeveloped across the provision.

7.3 Although some progress has been made in addressing the diversity of the student tutors' experience and prior achievement, particularly through the bridging courses and the mentoring systems, the majority of learners still follow the same programme in the same manner. The use of opportunities for differentiated teaching and learning, particularly through ILT, are not well planned.

7.4 In the student tutors' practice, there was minimal evidence of the effective use of ILT to support and develop learning. The resource infrastructure in some of the placements was inadequate and did not provide possibilities for the student tutors to use ILT to support their teaching.

7.5 Within the overall literacy provision, a majority of student tutors showed an emerging understanding of the importance of initial and diagnostic assessment and their relationship to planning for learning, and demonstrated some capacity to use the results to build up a profile of their adult learners. In a majority of cases, the student tutors were sensitive to the adult learners' needs, interests and motivations for learning and were able to match these interests effectively to the teaching, learning and assessment process. However, a significant minority of student tutors in both literacy and numeracy, particularly those coming new to the profession, demonstrated a lack of confidence in dealing with the planning for and the use of differentiated approaches to teaching and learning.

## **8. LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT**

### **8.1 THE QUALITY AND MANAGEMENT OF THE PLACEMENTS**

8.1.1 The quality of the placements is variable. Across the QUB and the FE provision, most of the student tutors benefit from the opportunity to observe an experienced tutor while on placement. However, in literacy and numeracy, approximately 50% of the student tutors visited were in placements where they were teaching adults groups only. These placements provided a restricted range of classroom experiences, and limited the development of the student tutors' capacities to plan and manage classroom activities for other cohorts, for example the sixteen to nineteen year old learners. A minority of these placements were in community venues where, in some cases, the student tutors had limited access to the support of an experienced tutor, and access to ILT resources was minimal. The remaining student tutors were in placements where they taught exclusively 16-19 year olds and similarly, their range of lesson planning and classroom management experiences were restricted.

8.1.2 The quality of the management of the placements is also variable. In the best practice, in one college, the course co-ordinator ensures that the student tutors work alongside an experienced member of the essential skills teaching team which enhances the quality and continuity of the experience, and facilitates monitoring and evaluation. By contrast, another student tutor worked in relative isolation in a community venue, and while the mentorship and mentor feedback were effective and supportive, the overall experience lacked sufficient opportunities for breadth and depth of learning and development of practice.



8.1.3 The quality of the mentoring arrangements across the majority of the provision is variable. The model adopted by one of the colleges of placing the students within their existing essential skills provision and using some of their own tutors as mentors, continues to work well. The development of a mentoring handbook by QUB, and two of the colleges, and the provision of mentoring training by QUB have improved the understanding of the principles and practices of mentoring. However, the problem of securing appropriate mentors, and ensuring their quality and understanding of the role continues to be a difficult one, and is made more difficult by the allocation of the student tutors to placements which have very small numbers of staff.

8.1.4 Lines of communication between the mentors themselves, and between experienced tutors and course co-ordinators, could be improved through the more effective use of ILT. Opportunities for synchronous communication and for e-learning need to be further developed and exploited, across the full range of the provision.

8.1.5 The quality assurance procedures within the QUB have been enhanced by the former Institute of Lifelong Learning's overall involvement in the School of Education's self-evaluation procedures. However, the improvements on the main university campus need to be further embedded within and across the franchised provision.

8.1.6 Within the FE provision, while self-evaluation of the tutor education programme is part of the colleges' wider quality review processes, the use of the self-evaluation procedure, as a working process, to develop the programme on an ongoing basis, remains an area for development. Colleges could use, for example, the self-evaluation process to assess the impact of the student tutors' work while on placement. Where essential skills tutors are newly appointed to colleges, important opportunities to support the continuing professional development of their practice, through the self-evaluation process, are frequently overlooked.

## **9. CONCLUSION**

9.1 The QUB and FE co-ordinators and their teams have worked hard to address the issues identified in the original reports. The standards and outcomes and the quality of teaching and learning are good overall. However, the arrangements for mentoring and the quality and range of the student tutors' experience within the majority of the placements needs to be reviewed. There are, for example, few opportunities provided for them to work with adults in the workplace. Overall, placements need to be managed more effectively to ensure that the student tutors can gain experience in teaching as wide a variety as possible of essential skills learners.

9.2 The tutor education programmes, the assignments, course regulations and associated reading materials are good. However, the essential skills landscape, in which the student tutors now work, has changed considerably and consideration needs to be given to the preparation of the student tutors for the full range of teaching duties across the FE and training system, and business, industry and community settings.

## **KEY PRIORITIES FOR DEVELOPMENT**

The key priorities for development are the:

- effective use of ILT to support more innovative and creative practices in teaching and learning by both the tutors and the student tutors;
- need to review the student tutors' placements to ensure that the placements provide experience of teaching a fuller range of essential skills learners, and that this is reflected in the pedagogical approaches; and
- need to ensure that the self-evaluation process leads to improvements in practice across the provision.

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