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*Promoting Quality in Teacher Education*

**OfSTED inspections of Initial Teacher Education**

**Briefing paper for UCET members**

Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to brief UCET members and others about the reported conduct and emerging outcomes of the OfSTED inspections of ITE provision that have been taking place since the Spring of 2021 and to make suggestions for ITE providers on the handling of these inspections.

Background

OfSTED has a statutory responsibility to carry out inspections of Initial Teacher Education programmes in England under the terms of Education Act 1994 and the Education and Inspection Act 2006. The inspections cover: all programmes leading to the recommendation for the award of Qualified Teacher Status (QTS); publicly funded teacher education programmes for the FE and skills sector; and programmes leading to ETYS status for teaching in the early years. The current ITE inspection framework [[1]](#footnote-1) was introduced in September 2020 although, because of the Covid 19 Pandemic, actual inspections did not begin until May 2021. Inspections are carried out on a 6-yearly rolling cycle, with grades of: ‘inadequate’; ‘requires improvement’; ‘good’; and ‘outstanding’ attributed separately to QTS, FE and EYTS provision.

Before the introduction of the new inspection cycle, all ITE provision was graded by OfSTED as being either ‘good’ or ‘outstanding’. These judgements are supported by the results of surveys of newly qualified teachers themselves. For example, the results of a Teacher Tapp survey[[2]](#footnote-2) found that 76% of teachers trained in the last two years, and 71% of those trained in the last 5 years, thought that their ITE programmes had prepared them well for their first teaching role. The government’s own survey of newly qualified teachers, before it was curtailed in 2015, produced similar results.

Recent inspection outcomes

In contrast to inspections carried out under previous frameworks, of the 20 inspection reports published since July 2021[[3]](#footnote-3), three have been graded as ‘inadequate’ for their QTS provision, five as ‘requires improvement’, eleven as ‘good’ and just one as ‘outstanding’. This means that 40% of provision has so far been found to be wanting. Seven of those inspected under both current and previous frameworks have been downgraded, and some have closed provision as a result. Several inspection reports, some of which are subject to ongoing appeals, are in the pipeline for publication.

Concern has been expressed about the inspection outcomes and the ways in with the inspections have been carried out. Some of these concerns can be found in the following blog written by two former OfSTED inspectors with experience of inspecting ITE programmes:

<https://www.teachbest.education/a-look-at-recent-itt-inspections-by-terry-russell-and-julie-price-grimshaw/>

Examples of the concerns expressed include:

* The behaviour of inspectors has been described as ‘belligerent’, with inspectors deliberately seeking out evidence for negative judgements and ITE staff feeling ‘battered and bruised’ and experiencing illness and anxiety at the end of inspections.
* Positive comments from student teachers have been rejected out of hand, while credence is given to negative comments.
* Questionable judgements about ‘non-compliance’ with the Secretary of State’s criteria for ITE (to which all programmes have to adhere). For example, providers have been accused of being non-compliant with regard to the pupil age-phases of which student teachers have to have experience of, despite the fact that age-phase requirements were suspended at the time inspections took place because of the impact of Covid on school closures.
* The publication of what are seen to be poorly written, hyper-critical, judgmental and humiliating inspection reports.

A key focus of inspections has been the importance of ITE providers having ambitious and compliant curricula which, amongst other things, ensure that student teachers receive the entitlements set out in the DfE’s new ITT Core Content Framework (CCF) or ITE introduced in September 2020[[4]](#footnote-4). However, in recognition of the pandemic-related challenges faced by providers, the criteria for the awarding of a ‘good’ inspection outcome in 2020-21 was subject to the following transition statement from OfSTED: *‘partnerships who can demonstrate that that they have an ambitious and compliant curriculum, will not be unfairly penalised if they are not able to deliver it in its entirety’.* There is no evidence that such considerations have been reflected in actual inspection outcomes. OfSTED claims that the transition statement does not apply to the CCF would appear to be disingenuous as the CCF is the key reason why new curricula needed to be developed.

The OfSTED ITE research report

Before formal inspections began in May 2021, OfSTED carried out a number of virtual visits to 75 ITE providers to look into the provision of ITE during the pandemic. Feedback from providers immediately following these visits was generally positive, with discussions felt to be, on the whole, collegiate and professional.

However, when the resulting report (‘Training Teachers during Covid 19’[[5]](#footnote-5)) was published in May 2021, it found that:

* Too few partnerships have a sufficiently ambitious ITE curriculum. For example, only a minority of partnerships could demonstrate that they had incorporated trainees’ statutory minimum curriculum entitlement into their plans, and very few had gone beyond it.Too many partnerships are overly reliant on the experiences that trainees gain through placements to provide ITE curriculum content in subjects and phases.
* While many partnerships have found innovative methods for enabling trainees to make up for lost time in the classroom due to COVID-19, these efforts are unlikely to be enough to provide trainees with full and rounded ITE.
* Some ITE programmes are underpinned by outdated or discredited theories of education.

FOI requests from UCET and journalist Warwick Mansell for details of evidence from the research visits to justify these claims were rejected on the grounds of confidentiality, despite the fact that information that would identify individual institutions was not requested. The ‘confidentiality’ argument used in response to Warwick Mansell’s request for details of the number of providers whose curricula were underpinned by ‘outdated and discredited theories’ was particularly questionable, as he only requested information about the number of providers concerned. Neither has any information been forthcoming about what the ‘outdated and discredited’ theories actually are.

The political context and the DfE’s review of the ITE Market

The more adversarial approach to inspections being carried out by OfSTED has coincided with the DfE’s review of the ITE Market[[6]](#footnote-6) which, amongst other things, proposes greater prescription about how ITE programmes are designed, delivered and structured and how ITE partnerships are governed. It also recommends that all existing, and potentially new, ITE providers go through an accreditation/reaccreditation process during which they will have to demonstrate that they meet new quality criteria if they are to continue to deliver ITE. It is a matter for conjecture as to whether the new OfSTED approach to inspections is directly linked to the Market Review, although OfSTED findings in relation to ‘outdated and discredited’ theories has been referenced in DfE Market Review documentation.

Concerns have been expressed from a range of organisations[[7]](#footnote-7) that the Market Review proposals will lead to: many fewer accredited ITE providers, with potential negative consequences for teacher supply; an undermining of the freedom ITE providers have to design and deliver intellectually robust ITE programmes that meet the needs of their partner schools and local communities; and an undermining of the professionalism of the teaching profession.

It would seem quite possible that OfSTED will be involved in the accreditation/reaccreditation process in some capacity or another.

Handling of inspections by ITE providers

It is unlikely that any further inspections will take place before January 2022. OfSTED will notify ITE providers on the Wednesday prior to inspections beginning the following Monday (with appropriate adjustments in respect of Bank Holiday weekends).

It is a matter for individual ITE providers to decide how best to handle the inspection process. However, in the current climate, we would recommend that, in advance of inspections, providers:

* Cross check, in detail, the content and structure of their programmes against the Secretary of State’s requirements for ITE[[8]](#footnote-8) and the OfSTED ITE inspection framework and inspectors handbook.
* Ensure that student teachers have placement experiences that match the age-phases set out in programme documentation, including prospectuses and marketing material.
* Ensure that student teachers are in receipt of their CCF entitlements, that the CCF is clearly reflected in ITE curricula and that students are able to articulate how they have received their CCF entitlement.
* Familiarise themselves with the content of published inspection reports, all of which can be found on the OfSTED website.
* Seek the advice of, where possible, other ITE providers who have been subject to inspection.

A more detailed checklist, prepared by ex-HMI John Williams (to whom we are grateful) can be found as an annex to this document.

During the inspections themselves, it is suggested that:

* Inappropriate comments and behaviour of inspectors are challenged and documented.
* Unfounded or questionable claims made by inspectors about compliance issues are documented and, where appropriate, challenged.
* Detailed notes are taken of all meetings and discussions with inspectors, particularly feedback meetings.

Providers might also want to consider having a legal presence at formal feedback meetings. Providers should be confident to appeal against and complain about inspection outcomes where they think this is justified.

Conclusion

UCET will monitor the situation carefully, and will continue to hold events to help member institutions prepare for inspections. We stand ready to provide advice to individual member institutions as necessary.

UCET

October 2021

**ANNEX**

**A checklist of activities related to an analysis on Ofsted ITE reports June – September 2021**

Each activity is categorised under the headings of observation (o), discussion(d) and analysis of documentation or data (a).

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| What do trainees think of the quality of the central and school - based training? | da |
| Does the training programme make sense to trainees and trainers? | d |
| Do mentors understand the programme and do they understand their role in the process? | d |
| Has the training been modified for individuals as well as the whole group as a result of QA procedures? | da |
| Are mentors quality assured by leaders through analysis of trainees’ documentation and direct observation of target setting and trainee feedback? | dao |
| Are targets SMART and are they followed up? Are they progressive? | a |
| Can progression in meeting targets be seen from trainees’ folders? | a |
| How well do trainees teach? | o |
| What is the quality of centre – based training and how do you know? | da |
| Show how the school - based training links to and builds on the central training and how trainees apply what they have learnt in practice | da |
| Do trainees understand their role in safeguarding. Show where safeguarding training has taken place in the programme | da |
| Are trainees exposed to up-to-date research and have they have applied this in their placements? | da |
| Do trainers understand the training programme and its links to the CCF. Is there a clear link between the training and the CCF? | da |
| Check you are assessing students during the course against the curriculum (which should incorporate the CCF). | a |
| Is the training curriculum ambitious? | da |
| Are Primary trainees trained in the centre and in schools in the foundation subjects as well as phonics, English and mathematics? Is it in depth? | da |
| Do secondary trainees go into depth in aspects of their subject knowledge and subject knowledge to teach? | da |
| SEND, EAL and inequalities must be addressed. Can trainees demonstrate where they have applied their training in these areas and changed their planning to address them? | da |
| Can you show how well trainees plan, teach and assess pupils towards the end of their training? | da |
| Diagrammatically, show where your evidence demonstrates the partnership fully meets the compliance criteria. | a |
| Does the management understand the strengths, pinch points and areas for development of the partnership? | da |
| What % of trainees complete the course successfully and gain employment. Has this remained high or improved over time? | a |

1. https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/initial-teacher-education-ite-inspection-framework-and-handbook [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. https://www.teachbest.education/ [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. As at 1 October 2021 [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\_data/file/974307/ITT\_core\_content\_framework\_.pdf [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/teaching-teachers-during-covid-19/teaching-teachers-during-covid-19 [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/initial-teacher-training-itt-market-review/initial-teacher-training-itt-market-review-overview [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. E.g. https://www.ucet.ac.uk/13249/ucet-market-review-response-july-2021 [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/initial-teacher-training-criteria/initial-teacher-training-itt-criteria-and-supporting-advice [↑](#footnote-ref-8)