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The grading of teaching observations: implications for teacher educators in Higher Education partnerships

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*University of*  
**HUDDERSFIELD**

**The grading of teaching  
observations: implications  
for teacher educators in  
Higher Education partnerships**

**Final Report**

**July 2009**

Ros Ollin

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Ros Ollin

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## 1 Executive Summary

This research project was carried out in response to the introduction of Ofsted's new grading criteria for inspection of ITE in the LSS (2009), which state that over fifty percent of trainees need to be judged 'outstanding' for an ITE provider to achieve the highest inspection grade. Ofsted now places an increased emphasis on classroom observation of teaching to provide evidence for inspection, which raises the issue of what tutors observing trainee teachers consider to be 'outstanding' teaching.

The research considered what tutors in the Huddersfield PCET Consortium understand by the term 'outstanding' in relation to trainee performance, with a focus on classroom teaching. The views of tutors involved in teaching observations of trainees on the Certificate in Education/PGCE were compared with a list of features associated with outstanding teaching. This was generated through analysis of case studies of 'outstanding' and 'weak' trainees produced by Consortium Centre managers. The observing tutors were then observed carrying out teaching observations and giving feedback. This was followed by semi-structured interviews and analysis of the documentation supporting the observation.

The features of outstanding teaching generated by the tutors were broadly similar to the key features of outstanding lessons identified in the Ofsted grading criteria. However Ofsted included more emphasis on the measurement and achievement of targets and learning outcomes and the 'Every Child Matters' Agenda, whereas tutors also included less definable, complex features. The research considered the effect of teaching context on notions of 'outstanding' teaching and data indicated that most tutors took the effects of context into account when observing trainees teach. Context could affect the type of students that attended, the way subjects were taught, the kind of teaching approaches that were favoured and the resources that were available. Trainees teaching in an HE in FE context provided an illustration of this, with different teaching spaces, session plans and attitude to measurement of learning outcomes signalling that HE in FE was different from FE teaching. There were characteristics associated with this type of teaching that marked it out from other LSS contexts. Tutors' comments also indicated how the constraints of certain teaching contexts might limit a trainee's potential to demonstrate 'outstanding' teaching.

The processes and content of tutor feedback following observations were analysed, including tutors' views on grading and how the new Ofsted grading criteria affected post-observation feedback. The research considered issues for HE ITE partnerships emerging from the grading of observations for college QA systems, in particular the tensions between the developmental (formative) and judgemental (summative) assessment purposes of teaching observation. This was particularly relevant where trainees on an ITE programme were also members of FE college teaching staff and where some Certificate in Education/PGCE tutors based in FE colleges also carried out a college quality assurance role in relation to observed teaching. In

order to obtain an FE college perspective, the views of HR managers from different colleges also informed the research.

Many issues emerged related to the effect of Ofsted grading on tutor observations of teaching. Interlinked themes emerging from the data included different perceptions of the purposes of observation, trainee and tutor identities and processes and content of tutor feedback. In-service trainees were 'learners on a course', 'learner teachers on a course' and 'teachers in an FE college'; observing tutors were 'teachers', 'learners' (from their trainees), teachers in an FE college and assessors of teaching quality in an FE college. Tutors had a strong sense of their identities as 'teachers' and showed this through their approach to feedback, which was mainly developmental and supportive. Some tutors appeared reluctant to adopt a summative assessment role in relation to trainees being observed for the ITE course, as they viewed the purpose of observation as developmental in that context. Although previous reports (Peake, 2006; Burrows, 2008) have indicated that trainees appreciate the opportunity for development, tutors were not confident that trainees were clear about the standard of teaching they had achieved.

Views on grading depended on perceptions of the purposes of observation. The research indicated that tutors' resistance to grading derived from a view that it would undermine the developmental nature of observations. Some tutors indicated that trainees would find grading helpful, as it would give them a clear indication of the criteria against which they were being observed. For trainees who were both trainee teacher and college employee, observations served different purposes – for formative development in the ITE course and for summative judgement related to quality assurance of teaching standards as a college employee.

Some tutors were also involved in college observations for QA purposes. These tutors described pressures from management if trainees were given low grades as members of college staff. They also described pressures from trainees who were being inspected for college purposes and who wanted an indication of the grade they might receive. Here tutors were aware of the potential impact on trainees if they adopted the language of Ofsted grading criteria.

The research concluded that the Ofsted grading criteria are likely to have a significant impact on ITE for the LSS and ITE providers will need to consider how they balance underpinning values related to learning and development of trainees, with increasing demands for standards of teaching to be monitored and assured.

## 2 Rationale

In recent years government reforms of initial teacher education (ITE) for the Lifelong Learning Sector (LSS) have produced changes in ITE programmes such as the Certificate in Education/PGCE. These programmes must be endorsed against the Lifelong Learning UK (LLUK) national standards for teachers in that sector and are also subject to inspection by the Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted). Government policy emphasises 'excellence' and 'enhancement' of quality and is based on an expectation that individuals and institutions are capable of 'continuous improvement'. This is reflected in the approach taken in the new Ofsted inspection regime, which considers an organisation's capacity to 'improve', as well as the quality of teaching and learning. The use of grading criteria based on four grades – outstanding (1), good (2), satisfactory (3) and inadequate(4) – provide a means of judging performance and measuring this improvement. Ofsted not only inspects LSS education and training institutions using the Common Inspection Framework (CIF) for Schools and Colleges, but also ITE, using an inspection framework for ITE provision (Ofsted, 2008a).

Higher Education Institution (HEI) and Further Education (FE) college partnerships, such as the Huddersfield Post-Compulsory Education and Training (PCET) Consortium, offering Certificate in Education/PGCE programmes, are subject to Ofsted ITE inspection. As part of the process self-evaluation documents must be produced, including self-assessment against the four Ofsted grades and demonstrating how their systems are able to monitor and improve performance. A major focus here is the ability to monitor and improve the performance of pre-service and in-service trainee teachers on courses offered within their ITE provision.

This research considers these grading issues in relation to a central aspect of ITE - the processes of classroom observation and the judgements made by Certificate in Education/PGCE tutors in the Huddersfield Consortium when observing trainees teach. In particular it investigates the characteristics associated with teaching at the highest grade - 'outstanding' - and whether definitions are affected by different teaching contexts. It considers what tutors believe are characteristics of different teaching contexts, using HE in FE as a specific example. It explores how tutors form judgements about 'outstanding' teaching and how they translate these judgements into feedback to trainees. It also raises issues about the different purposes of classroom observation and how grading impacts upon these functions.

The impact of grading criteria on ITE programmes which previously operated on a pass/fail basis will influence the way that Certificate in Education/PGCE programmes are developed and delivered. Teacher educators in HEI partnerships need to develop shared understandings of what the grading terms mean within the context of their provision. They need to address ways of monitoring stages in a trainee's development throughout programmes such as the

Certificate in Education/PGCE and, as part of this, decide whether grading trainee performance is appropriate for their provision. This is not a straightforward decision, but one that involves clarifying the values and beliefs about ITE that underpin their work, whilst adapting to changing policy and inspectoral requirements. It is further complicated by the requirements and standards of the different stakeholders in ITE for LSS. These include the Government, Ofsted, LLUK, FE College and other LSS employers, LSS and HE funding bodies. These factors all impact on the individuals involved in Certificate in Education/PGCE programmes, both tutors and trainees. However full-time pre-service programmes trainees have relatively unambiguous 'trainee' status, whereas the situation is more complex for part-time in-service trainees. These are not only trainee teachers on an ITE course, but are also teaching staff employed in FE colleges or other contexts in the LSS. Given that Ofsted use different criteria in college inspection of teaching staff than are used for ITE programmes involved in developing teachers, these trainees are caught within two different inspection systems. For Certificate in Education/PGCE programmes a major issue is how to balance the tensions between the two sets of requirements for these trainees.

## **2.1 Observation of teaching**

In 2004, a government report recommended more emphasis on the practical aspects of teaching and highlighted the importance of classroom observation (DfES, 2004). Observation of teaching has always been a significant part of ITE programmes, generally with a developmental focus and previously this approach has been compatible with FE college and Ofsted requirements. In the past ITE providers for the LSS have been free to develop their own criteria for observation (Ewens, 2001), but now Ofsted criteria need to be taken into account.

### **2.1.1 Graded observations**

Recent Ofsted inspections based on the Common Inspection Framework (CIF) for schools and colleges, have raised the profile of observation of teaching in employing institutions. During inspections, selected teachers are observed and the results inform the final Ofsted grade for the provision. Currently the observed teacher is not given a grade by the inspector, although a judgement is made about the grade category in which the teacher would be placed. This is used to inform the overall profile of the quality of teaching and learning within the institution. Ofsted's introduction of the Self Evaluation document, in which institutions must propose grades for their own performance, has led to an increase in teacher monitoring and lesson observations (NUT, 2007) although doubts have been expressed about the positive impact of inspection on classroom performance (O'Leary, 2006). In FE colleges, observations of teaching staff are intended to monitor and improve the quality of teaching and learning, but also serve more managerialist functions (Cockburn, 2005), such as collecting evidence for self- evaluation, appraisal and capability procedures (UCU, 2008).

In bringing their internal Quality Assurance (QA) observation processes in line with Ofsted CIF criteria, FE colleges have moved towards the use of the four Ofsted grades. Tutors on Certificate in Education/PGCE programmes, faced with Ofsted requirements for self-evaluation against the ITE grade criteria, are now in the position of observing in-service trainees, described as having the 'dual identities' of trainee and employee (Orr and Simmons, in progress). Hence when these trainees are observed teaching for college internal QA they are being graded as 'employees', but when observed teaching as trainees on the Certificate in Education/PGCE programmes programme, they are currently un-graded. This is a potentially confusing situation for both trainee and observing tutor and provokes questions about the relationship between trainee performance on the Certificate in Education/PGCE and their performance in the college environment. Tensions between identities may also arise for tutors who are college employees carrying out observations for internal QA purposes, but also tutors on the Certificate in Education/PGCE.

### **2.1.2 Ofsted grading criteria for ITE**

When inspecting HEI ITE partnerships, such as the Huddersfield PCET Consortium, Ofsted use ITE criteria related to the four grades to measure key aspects of trainees' performance (Ofsted, 2008a). For an institution to gain the top grade (grade 1), Ofsted states that more than half the trainees should be judged 'outstanding', with no more than one tenth judged to be 'satisfactory'. Ofsted's notion of a trainee's 'potential' to be outstanding takes into account four factors: the quality of the trainees' teaching, their work files, their explanations of judgements underpinning teaching and learning and a series of personal and professional characteristics.

The use of the word 'potential' to be 'outstanding' indicates that Ofsted acknowledges that trainees are not fully-developed as teachers. In their inspection guidance, they distinguish between trainees and experienced teachers, specifying that the criteria used relate to the quality of teachers in training, not those of qualified practitioners. (Ofsted, 2009). Ofsted suggest that not all lessons need to be 'outstanding' for a trainee to be considered to have 'outstanding' potential, although some need to be at least 'good'. They also stress the importance of the trainee as learner, including learning from mistakes or when lessons do not go as planned.

### **2.1.3 Previous research on observation of teaching**

The notion of trainee as learner teacher impacts on the way that observations are perceived. Previous research reports for the Consortium indicated that trainees perceived the observation process in developmental terms. For example, Peake notes:

*'For the trainee, observation is a progressive and developmental process, which reassures and encourages them to strive for the highest level of professionalism within their chosen field' (Peake, 2006, p.8).*

Burrows' report published two year's later (2008) confirmed trainees' perception that observed teaching was 'formative' assessment, but also highlighted a lack of understanding that observations had a 'summative' assessment function. In fact, she reports that some trainees believed observations could not be failed. At the time Peake's (2006) report was written, the Ofsted grading criteria for ITE had not been introduced and Ofsted observations in educational institutions were seen as very different from ITE observations. However, by 2008, Burrows indicated the emerging issue of grading of observed teaching and reported that just over a third of trainees would like to receive a grade when being observed.

Research elsewhere on observed teaching has highlighted the differences between development and appraisal functions of teaching observations and the contrast between HE and FE systems of observation (Hardman, 2007). It suggests that FE is more focussed on quality assurance, with HE taking a gentler approach, less linked to performance management and with more use of peer observation (Hardman, 2007). These offer the potential of different models of observation, derived from different purposes, however, this also indicates the tensions that may occur related to observed teaching, when HE provision is located within an FE college (Ewens, and Orr, 2002).

Hardman's (2007) research raises an issue of concern also considered in this current research report - the tensions between in-service trainees who are also FE college employees. She illustrates ways that different colleges have dealt with this issue – from treating trainees as full employees to operating a differentiated system which treats trainees differently. This suggests that in a large consortium in partnership with a number of colleges, a number of different college practices may need to be taken into account.

#### **2.1.4 Ofsted and conceptions of 'outstanding'**

For a trainee to be judged to have 'outstanding potential', their teaching must '*show characteristics of outstanding lessons*' (Ofsted, 2009, p.29), although not all lessons need to be 'outstanding'.

A key determinant in the overall grade awarded to ITE provision is '*a provider's ability to ensure consistent quality across all its remits*' (Ofsted, 2008a, p.9). This raises the issue of whether all Consortium tutors agree on what is meant by 'outstanding' teaching and how this is translated into judgements on the quality of observed teaching.

Although Ofsted criteria provide some guidance on characteristics associated with different grades, descriptors are not objective measures but always subject to individual interpretation (Wolf, 1993). Problems related to consistency in assessment judgements are endemic in the education sector and students are often unclear about the standards they are required to achieve (Mutch, 2003). It might be tempting to try and avoid problems by adopting a mechanistic approach using Ofsted criteria as a checklist for recording teaching behaviours e.g. those associated with 'outstanding' teaching. However research suggests deficiencies in over-simplistic approaches to defining 'excellence' and argues that notions of 'good practice' need to take into account context and locality. It further argues that these notions are situated within the practices relevant to that context (Coffield and Edwards, 2009). This recognises that professionals do not just decide what is 'good practice' on their own, nor do they adopt 'absolute' conceptions imposed from above, but generate meanings about these concepts through membership of 'communities of practice' (Wenger, 1998). Research also indicates the different ideologies which underpin particular notions of 'good' teaching (Moore, 2004). However there do appear to be broad areas of agreement on what constitutes 'excellent' teaching within the wider community of the teaching profession (Hattie, 2009).

Research on FE indicates flaws in the notion of 'improvement' through sharing of 'best practice', because practices may vary across sites and what works in one setting may not work in another (James and Biesta, 2007). This suggests another important issue for generating understandings of 'outstanding' teaching - whether characteristics of 'outstanding' teaching in one context will be the same as those related to another context. Given the varied teaching contexts of the LSS covered by the Consortium ITE provision including: FE, HE in FE, work-based learning, adult and community learning, police, fire, prison, health and armed services and private training (Noel, 2008), this issue may well be of significance. Indeed Ofsted have acknowledged that different contexts have different cultures and procedures, for example by developing a separate inspection handbook for work based and adult and community learning (Ofsted, 2008b). Although standards are set by Ofsted indicating common features of different grades of performance, Ofsted also suggest that the context may affect judgement and interpretation and indicate a 'best fit' model for trainee teachers in the FE system which *'needs to be interpreted within the setting and context in which the trainees work'* (Ofsted, 2009).

For trainees teaching HE in FE, the contextual differences have an additional layer of complexity. Their teaching is all in the same institution, but FE and HE in FE have differentiated educational identities. HE provision within FE colleges is currently working to produce an HE ethos with 'symbolic markers' such as separate spaces and different teaching approaches to create a 'student and staff identity that is distinct and separate' (Jones, 2006). HE in FE provision is not inspected by Ofsted but through Integrated Quality Enhancement

Reviews (IQER) carried out by the Quality Assurance Agency. Teachers or trainees also employed as teachers teaching on different courses within a college may face the situation of:

*'Mixed loads – teaching students in further education courses one hour and then at level four for the next'* (Jones, 2006, p.4)

An interesting question in this situation is whether the Certificate in Education/PGCE tutor observing the same trainee would use different interpretations of 'outstanding' teaching depending on whether they observe the first (FE) hour or the second (HE in FE) hour of that trainee's teaching time.

These complex issues are now to the forefront as the Ofsted grading criteria become more established and the focus on classroom observation increases. The challenge for the Consortium is to develop well-considered and robust notions of what constitutes 'outstanding' teaching, providing the opportunity to clarify expectations about the highest standards to which trainees can aspire. These can provide a benchmark against which to measure the other potential grades in the Ofsted grading criteria for inspection and may also influence Ofsted's own interpretation of how the criteria operate in practice.

In this situation, tutors' beliefs on the characteristics of an 'outstanding' lesson and whether notions of 'outstanding' depend on the teaching context are key issues for Consortium tutors to consider. The challenges to face include whether more precise shared understandings of complex concepts such as 'outstanding' can be developed without reducing them to 'tick boxes' and how ITE providers in HEI partnerships can balance course and employers' requirements for in-service trainees who are both trainees and college employees.

### **3 Project aims**

The aims of this research project were as follows:

1. To gain information about teaching observation judgements made by tutors across a PCET ITE network and how these compare with Ofsted grading criteria
2. To develop a working conceptualisation of what constitutes 'outstanding' teaching for trainees working in an HE in FE context
3. To use this information to further develop staff and quality systems, taking into account issues of grading of trainees' practical teaching
4. To publish and disseminate this information to practitioners and academics

## **4 Methodology and Process**

### **4.1 Rationale for methodology**

This research is sited within a community of practice (Wenger, 1998) operating in an HEI ITE partnership for the LSS and was intended to explore how participants understand 'outstanding' teaching in 'classroom' observation of trainees. Here the term 'classroom' is used to indicate any environment where the formal purpose is to enable students to learn. The study concerns how these understandings are put into practice when tutors are making judgements and giving feedback on observed teaching. The LSS has a myriad of different types of learning environments and previous research indicates that ideas of good practice vary across different contexts of teaching (James and Biesta, 2007). Hence this research will also consider how 'outstanding' teaching is understood in a specific context, that of classroom observations of trainees teaching HE in FE.

The research is qualitative and interpretive in nature, concerned with 'the ways that people construct, interpret and give meaning to ...experiences' (Gerson and Horowitz, 2002, p.199). It explores the understandings and practices of individual Certificate in Education/PGCE tutors participating in the community of practice of the Huddersfield Consortium ITE provision. However, it also investigates how understandings are shared across the community, where meanings 'are not only produced by individuals but circulate socially' (Lawler, 2002, p.251) and form part of 'public narratives' which occur within 'cultural and institutional formations' (Somers and Gibson, 1994, p.62). This enables us to compare individual and communal understandings of 'outstanding' in terms of scope and consistency.

### **4.2 Research methods**

In interpretive research, the methods are intended to produce data which are 'context-rich and meaningful' and provide an account which 'rings true' (Miles and Huberman, 1994, p.279). A range of methods for gathering data were used:

*'Qualitative research is multimethod in focus, involving an interpretive, naturalistic approach to its subject matter.'* (Denzin and Lincoln, 1984, p.2)

Interviews and observations are used extensively in qualitative research and these were the main methods selected to gain data from individual participants in this research project. However, to locate their ideas in the wider context of the Huddersfield Consortium ITE community, consisting of the University and FE colleges, focus groups were also used. The qualitative research was supported by a limited amount of quantitative data to provide background information.

#### **4.2.1. Sample**

A purposive sample of individual participants was selected, drawn from in-service Certificate in Education/PGCE tutors carrying out observed teaching who were in a position to provide 'insight and understanding' into the research questions (Burns, 2000, p.465). Trainees being observed were all in-service trainees operating with the 'dual identities' (Orr and Simmons, in progress) of learners on an ITE programme and college teaching staff.

This sample was further focussed onto tutors who had trainees teaching HE in FE on the Certificate in Education/PGCE course at their particular centre, with the potential to make comparisons between the requirements of the HE in FE context and other contexts.

#### **4.2.2 Minimising bias**

As the main researcher was also a consortium tutor carrying out observations for the in-service Certificate in Education/PGCE, it was important to minimise researcher bias. Another researcher carried out some of the co-observations and interviews (n=3); this researcher was also involved in discussion of the data as they emerged. Data collection methods were triangulated and at dissemination events, participants were asked to comment on the accuracy of the research findings in relation to their own understandings and perceptions. Comments received both written and verbally were taken into account in the final research analysis.

#### **4.2.3 Email questionnaire**

To provide background information and a participant sample to be selected, an email questionnaire was sent to all consortium centre managers (n=32). This asked about grading criteria for observations within their own organisations and the extent of their role in grading observations for internal college Quality Assurance purposes. It also asked about the number of trainees teaching HE in FE on the Certificate in Education/PGCE at their centre.

#### **4.2.4 Consortium tutors' focus group: case studies of trainees**

Focus groups enable participants to share ideas, values, beliefs and their use of language about a particular topic (Kitzinger, 1995). At a consortium network meeting, preparing for an Ofsted inspection, consortium tutors (n=44), including consortium network managers from the in-service programme and tutors from pre-service programmes acted as a focus group, discussing what they understood by 'outstanding' and 'weak' or 'inadequate' trainees. They also discussed issues related to the grading of trainees. These discussions were based on real-life but anonymised written case studies (n=27) provided by centre managers on 'outstanding' and 'weak' trainees. Notes taken during small group discussions followed by the plenary discussion provided data on the range of views held by the community of practitioners in the consortium.

#### **4.2.5 Co-observation, observation of feedback and semi-structured interview**

To gain the views of individual tutors (n=9), researchers visited the colleges where the tutors worked. Denzin and Lincoln highlight the importance of research being conducted in participants' natural settings, so that ideas are situated in concrete practices illuminating participants' accounts and helping researchers:

*'..to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them.'* (Denzin and Lincoln, 1984, p.2)

Researchers on this project each co-observed tutors carrying out an observation of a trainee, then observed the process of feedback. The post-observation feedback to the trainee was then observed and notes taken about the use of tutor language and the feedback process. After the trainee had left, the researcher conducted a semi-structured interview with the tutor focussing initially on understandings and judgements of 'outstanding' related to the specific observation (Appendix 1). This interview was audio-recorded and later transcribed.

The majority of interview questions had been sent beforehand to participants. Participants were experienced ITE tutors and, as such were treated as informed participants who could bring professional knowledge to the research discussion. Questions were only withheld beforehand if included to establish internal validity or if they might have significantly prejudiced the tutor's interview response. A pilot interview without co-observation had previously been conducted to trial the interview questions and as a result two questions were added to the original schedule. All but one of the co-observations were conducted with a tutor observing a trainee teaching HE in FE. The remaining co-observation involved a trainee teaching a traditional FE craft course. Although only a single instance, this provided some possibility for comparison between the FE and FE/HE college contexts.

#### **4.2.6 Supporting documents**

The research drew on various supporting artefacts. The written case studies provided for the focus group discussion at the consortium network meeting were analysed in detail.

Documents supporting the observation process were also included. These were as follows:

- Form TP1: Completed by the trainee, providing details of their group and the planning process and given to the tutor prior to observation
- Form TP2: Tutor feedback form – completed standard proforma used by consortium tutors
- Form TP3: Reflections written by the trainee following the observed session
- Copies of the trainee's session plan and accompanying resources.

#### **4.2.7 Human Resource (HR) managers focus group**

A significant issue was the potential conflict between the trainee as learner on an ITE programme and trainee as college employer. Taking an opportunistic approach, a group of HR managers from a variety of FE colleges (n=9) attending a HUDCETT event were invited to act as a focus group. The HR managers were presented with interim research findings and invited to discuss these from a college HR perspective, using a series of question prompts.

These HR managers were from different FE colleges than the nine co-observed research participants. Although this meant the data could not be used in direct triangulation of individual participants' views on grading, it had the advantage of increasing the range of college perspectives available.

#### **4.2.8 Data analysis**

Transcripts of the research interviews were analysed in detail, using an approach derived from grounded theory (Strauss and Corbin, 1990). Rather than pre-imposing hypotheses, ideas are drawn from the data, through a process of categorisation and re-categorisation. In this process themes emerge and are strengthened or re-categorised as more data are considered. Research notes from the observed feedback, from the two focus group discussions and from supporting documentation were also analysed and used to inform the development of major themes.

Towards the end of the research process, analysis of the data showed that the data sources produced 'generally converging conclusions' (Miles and Huberman, 1994, p.279) and 'repetition from multiple sources' indicated that 'sufficient data have been collected' and it was reasonable to assume that 'saturation' had occurred (Morse, 1994, p.230).

#### **4.2.9 Limitations of the data**

Due to limitations of time and resources, only a small number of co-observations and semi-structured interviews were conducted. These were mainly on one teaching context – HE in FE. More co-observations of trainees teaching in a range of LSS contexts may have provided more comparative data. Another limitation is that trainees' views were only sought briefly about aspects of the observation. Although research has already been completed about trainees' views of observations (Burrows, 2008), it would have been useful to focus also on trainees' understanding of the standards they demonstrated in their teaching and how these matched with tutor judgements. This may form the subject of future research. Another limitation was that workplace mentors supporting trainees on ITE programmes were not involved. Obviously issues of grading will affect mentor observations as well and need to be taken into account in future research on observations.

### 4.3 Participant profiles related to grading of teaching observations

Questionnaire responses (n=30) showed that all college centres graded teaching observations as part of college Quality Assurance (QA) systems, using grading criteria based on the Ofsted Common Inspection Framework criteria for FE inspection. Some tutors involved as research participants were only observing in their role as Certificate in Education/PGCE tutor, with no current involvement in grading observations. However a number of consortium tutors were also involved in observations for their college QA system. In this situation there is a possibility of role conflict, through involvement in two different observation systems

#### 4.3.1 Consortium centre managers involvement in grading observations

All consortium centres, apart from those based on University of Huddersfield sites, are based in FE colleges. As well as being tutors themselves, centre managers within the consortium have a management, development and quality assurance role relating to their tutor team on the Certificate in Education/PGCE in their centres. Hence the centre manager has considerable influence on how the team operates. Nearly 50% of centre managers in FE colleges in the consortium were also involved in college QA of teaching observations as well as observations for Cert Ed/PGCE.

	Percentage of total sample	Number
Centre managers taking part in grading of observations for own college QA	46.66	N=14
Centre managers NOT taking part in grading of observations for own college QA	53.34	N=16

#### 4.3.2 Tutors co-observed carrying out observations

Out of the nine tutors co-observed carrying out teaching observations, nearly half (n=4) were involved in grading for their own colleges QA. All but two of the tutors were full-time with both teaching and observation of teaching roles on the Certificate in Education/PGCE. Two part-time tutors were included, of these one tutor was involved only in observation of teaching for the Certificate in Education/PGCE.

Observing Tutor	Role	Involved in grading for organisation
Part-time	Tutor involved solely in teaching observations	No
Part-time	Tutor involved in observations and teaching	No
Full-time	Centre manager	Yes
Full-time	Centre manager	No
Full-time	Centre manager	No

Full-time	Centre manager	Yes
Full-time	Centre manager	Yes
Full-time	Centre manager	No
Full-time	Centre manager	Yes
Full-time	Tutor involved in observations and teaching	No

#### **4.4 Dissemination of research so far**

Presentations of the research so far have been at:

- University Council for Education of Teachers (UCET) post–sixteen committee: an interim report on the research given at the request of UCET committee members. The emerging issues were confirmed as significant in discussion at this event, which was attended by approximately fifty members.
- Consortium network conference: The research was presented at a workshop of Huddersfield Consortium tutors, attended by forty tutors. Oral and written comments were invited as to the accuracy of the research and the issues identified.
- Journal of Vocational Education and Training International Conference, Oxford University: Paper delivered to approximately twenty five participants.

## **5. Tutors' judgements of trainee performance - Analysis**

### **5.1 Case studies of 'outstanding' and 'weak' trainees**

This section begins by considering how the wider 'community of practice' (Wenger, 1998) of Consortium network tutors involved in the Certificate in Education/PGCE conceive the notion of 'outstanding' in relation to trainees. Discussions and stories related to excellent and poor performance create a culture within which individual tutor's observations of teaching, and judgements of 'outstanding' take place. Hence this section then goes on to explore how certain members of that community – tutors carrying out teaching observations – understand 'outstanding' teaching. However, these tutors draw on the concrete experience of observing a specific trainee as well as their own experiences.

An analysis of the case studies discussed in the focus group of Consortium tutors indicates how the Consortium 'community' views 'outstanding' and 'weak' performance. The case studies recognised trainee identities both as teacher and as learner.

#### **5.1.1 'Outstanding' trainees as teachers**

When consortium tutors described 'outstanding' trainees, there was generally more emphasis on trainees' capacities as teachers than as learners. This might suggest that the trainee as learner gave no cause for concern, allowing tutors to concentrate on the main focus of an ITE programme i.e. developing an individual's capacity as a teacher. Some of the most commonly identified aspects of 'outstanding' teaching are represented by the following descriptions in the case studies:

- *'Embraced principles of teaching and learning'*
- *'Motivated and open to new ideas. Enthuses learners – personality and belief in what teaching'*
- *'Inspires and challenges, but achievable targets. Effective embedding of ICT'*
- *'Wide variety of delivery approaches'*
- *'Good range of learning activities, addresses different learning styles'*
- *'Good formative assessment, clear feedback'*
- *'Always trying new ideas, technology, strategies'*
- *'Good planning'*
- *'Teaching incorporated differentiation, literacy, language and numeracy'*

A full list of these can be found in Appendix 2.

#### **5.1.2 'Outstanding' trainees as learners**

In learning, as in teaching, an active and enthusiastic approach was highly valued, where the trainee immersed themselves in the development opportunities provided by the ITE programme. Apart from high quality 'performance' as a learner, manifested by excellent assignment work, the list below also indicates how the learner/teacher identities overlap. The

trainee's job as a teacher is to enthuse others about learning, and enjoyment and commitment to their own learning is highly compatible with this. However, one case study gives an example of the trainee 'teaching' and supporting peers within their Certificate in Education/PGCE group. Here an indication of an 'outstanding' trainee included the willingness to move from the learning role into the teaching role, even when not a job requirement. Also of significance is the trainee's capacity to use and learn from tutor feedback. Comments from the case studies illustrate characteristics of the 'outstanding' trainee as learner:

- *'Active learner and team player'*
- *'Diligent, enthusiastic'*
- *'Embraced all aspects of Cert Ed and 'more importantly' applied this to own teaching'*
- *'Attended all taught sessions. Actively seeking out learning'*
- *'Showing evidence of embedding reflective practice and some basis theoretical approaches in written work'*
- *'Own written work linked theory and practice, wide reading, contributed in class'*
- *'Performs above expectations in module'*
- *'Supports and motivates other trainees, helps them to engage with learning theory'*
- *Accepted tutor feedback. Incorporating suggestions into future practice'*
- *'Constant improvement throughout Cert Ed'*

A full list can be found in Appendix 2.

### **5.1.3 'Weak' trainees**

In contrast to the case studies of 'outstanding' trainees, descriptions of 'weak' trainees placed more emphasis on the trainee as 'learner' on the ITE course, rather than on the trainee as a 'teacher'. Struggles with assignments, poor literacy and numeracy, lack of ability to cope with academic requirements all indicated a barrier to progressing successfully with the ITE course. In relation to teaching, a common characteristic of a 'weak' trainee was a limited capacity to take risks and extend their teaching range, through learning from reading, class discussion, their own reflection and from tutor feedback. Again this places more emphasis on the trainee's problems with learning from their participation on the ITE course. This view implies that the 'weak' trainee is unable to move forward with learning to teach, until they have learned how to learn about teaching. Conversely, the 'outstanding' trainee has learned this skill.

### **5.1.4 Contextual factors related to 'weak' trainees**

Unlike 'outstanding' trainees, where case studies made no reference to the effect of context on their performance, the effect of teaching context was a factor in relation to the performance of 'weak' trainees. A 'weak' trainee was often poorly motivated and lacked enthusiasm about teaching or learning. Comments referred to trainees having a small number of teaching hours, often in an unstable work situation where hours could be reduced or withdrawn. Lack of

personal motivation and commitment to the ITE course and to their teaching was often ascribed to these external factors. The LSS encompasses many different forms of provision, not only FE colleges, but many smaller organisations in a continual chase after funding to survive. Given the increasing profile of non-FE work contexts in the Consortium (Noel, 2008) the issue of contextual factors affecting the quality of trainee performance is of growing significance to ITE provision.

### 5.1.5 Gender profiles of ‘outstanding’ and ‘weak’ trainees

An analysis of the case studies in terms of the gender profiles of ‘outstanding’ and ‘weak’ trainees indicated that there was a significantly higher proportion of males identified as ‘weak’ than would be expected in the overall gender profile of the consortium Certificate in Education/PGCE.

#### Gender profiles of ‘outstanding’ trainees

Number of total where gender was specified	Percentage of total where gender was specified	Male	Female
18 out of 27	66.6%	18.5%	48.1%

There is a far greater percentage of females identified as ‘outstanding’ compared to males. However, this imbalance could be explained by the greater numbers of women on the course as identified in a previous project on trainee profiles (Noel, 2008).

#### Gender profiles of ‘weak’ trainees

Number of total where gender specified	Percentage of total where gender was specified	Male	Female
17 out of 27	62.9%	55.5%	7.4%

This indicates a significant gender imbalance in the trainees identified as weak. In the light of the greater number of women on the course, it could be anticipated that more females would be picked out as examples of ‘weak’ students. This is not the case, as the majority of weaker students identified are male. There are a number of possible reasons why this might be the case, including a greater number of males from craft backgrounds with few previous academic qualifications. However this is an area which needs further consideration by the Consortium.

## 5.2 Purposes of observation of teaching

Comments from the research participants suggested that the way a trainee’s performance was measured, including how ‘outstanding’ was interpreted could depend on the purposes of the teaching observation. The data revealed a number of different purposes for teaching

observations, dependent on the context in which they occurred. The main purposes were as follows:

### **5.2.1 Developing teachers' skills and knowledge**

All observing tutors saw the main purpose of the Certificate in Education/PGCE observations as developmental to help the trainee become a better teacher. As one tutor put it:

*'Teaching is a skill and it can be learnt and it can be learnt through practice, it isn't a case of just putting somebody in a classroom and hoping that they'll manage'.*

HR managers supported this view, describing the role of the Certificate in Education/PGCE tutor as *'developmental – moving the person forward'*.

### **5.2.2 Assuring standards of teaching**

None of the observing Certificate in Education/PGCE tutors directly mentioned the purpose of teaching observations in terms of assuring standards of teaching, although this view was implicit in many of their comments. In contrast, HR managers were explicit in viewing observations undertaken for college QA purposes as part of a process of:

*'Driving up standards, driving success rates, aspiring to excellence'*

HR managers described a number of different systems of organising college QA observations, including centralised quality units and line management observation at departmental level. Two colleges used external consultants for internal QA observation of teaching.

Significantly, although HR managers saw the role of the Certificate in Education/PGCE tutor as developmental, they also implied responsibility on the part of these tutors to assure standards of teaching:

*'it's about development; it's about trusting the tutors are clear about the standard'*

An issue here is what 'standard' is being expected – the standard of a person in training, or the standard expected of a fully trained teacher? HR managers did recognise this distinction, although they were divided in their views. One participant recognised the ambiguity of the notion of teaching 'standard' and asked:

*'Why not have a trainee grade? We need to clarify and define what we are assessing against'*

Some HR managers were unaware that Ofsted inspections used a different grading system for trainees on ITE programmes to college inspections. However another participant maintained that there should be no distinction between trainee and college employee as:

*'All students are entitled to the same quality of teaching'*

### **5.2.3 Informing college QA systems**

HR managers also described how the results of internal QA observations would be used quantitatively to give an overall picture of the organisation, an overall view of college staff and also a view of each department. This would enable them to create departmental profiles to see patterns and trends. For example, one participant talked about looking at departmental profiles:

*'If there were large numbers of grade 3 then there would be cause for concern'*

HR managers described how they would also look at correlations between observation rates and results and student achievement. This would indicate areas of 'good' practice and areas where development was needed.

### **5.2.4 Preparing for inspection**

HR managers discussed the impact of Ofsted inspections on colleges and indicated how continual monitoring and improvement of the quality of teaching was an important measure of success in the overall college grade. However some Certificate in Education/PGCE tutors described the college QA observation process as a tough and potentially destructive for trainees:

*'It's a little bit like a mock exam.....I think in some respects that's what organisations do, that they focus very, very harshly, hoping that when the real inspection comes along it will go through a lot smoother because people have really gone into it'*

In contrast, the Certificate in Education/PGCE tutor acted as a counterbalance to the 'harsh' pre-inspection process, with an essentially supportive role:

*'We need to generate confidence in their abilities – not 'shoot them down in flames' - people bruise easy'*

The four purposes of teaching observation identified by research participants indicate the potential tensions that might exist in relation to the expectations and understandings of the observation process driven by different stakeholder requirements.

## **5.3 Tutor judgements on observed teaching**

The data from the interviews following the co-observation and feedback to trainee, produced many 'thick' descriptions' (Geertz, 1973) of how notions of 'outstanding' performance given in the case studies were translated into practice by the observing tutors. In their discussions of the interview questions (Appendix 1) they used examples from the co-observed teaching, but also drew on detailed examples from previous observations of other trainees.

### 5.3.1 Process of observation

All tutors carried out a similar process of observation (Peake, 2006), making themselves as unobtrusive as possible whilst carrying out the observation (Harvey, 2006). However, one tutor did walk round the classroom during small group work and talk to the students about what they were doing. The tutor later used these discussions to inform the written observation feedback. Some tutors managed to speak to the trainee beforehand, whereas others went in half-way through a longer session. The majority wrote comments directly on the observation proforma, which were then handed to the trainee after feedback was discussed. One tutor used a laptop typing directly onto the observation proforma. This tutor and another tutor, who wrote rough notes, said they preferred to have time to think carefully about what they wanted to write, before giving the trainee the final written observation report. In one case, the tutor was very aware of the need to take care in the use of evaluative language, bearing in mind the Ofsted grades. This is an important issue which will be covered in detail in a later section.

### 5.3.2 What tutors looked for when carrying out teaching observations

Tutors described their initial focus when beginning to observe a trainee's teaching session. Some began by developing a feel for some kind of 'baseline' performance.

*'The baseline: "is learning taking place?"'*

This emphasised what the tutor observed about the 'learning' taking place within the session rather than the 'teaching', focussing on students' responses, looking for clues that something was being learned. This echoes Ofsted's emphasis on the importance of the learner experience. The relational aspects of teaching and learning were to the forefront in this tutor's account:

*'.. is there a kind of relationship between the lecturer or the tutor and the group, is there some kind of interaction going on, are the group responding to him or her as a person and is he responding to them as a person?'*

In this example, the tutor appeared concerned with the basics of human relationships, with individuals responding to each other as 'people' rather than as teacher and student. At the same time, the tutor was gaining a sense of how the trainee teacher fitted within that relationship. This focus on the teacher and learner relationships was echoed in comments by other tutors, and it was evident that this was considered key in any determinants of 'outstanding' teaching. Other key aspects included whether the teacher was projecting confidence and purpose, but also whether there was a sense of *common* purpose within this environment:

*'Does the deliverer have a sense of purpose...is it a kind of common journey taking place'*

Tutors described becoming sensitised to the 'feel' of a session and what this told them about the quality of teaching. One tutor described looking for an intangible 'energy' within the classroom which gave them a sense that something 'outstanding' might be occurring:

*'I'm looking for a feel, there's a feel for something which is outstanding and it's an energy almost. So I'm looking for a learning environment which is really purposeful.'*

Some tutors looked systematically for learner involvement, but here involvement or lack of involvement was also sensed rather than measured:

*'... if there's a learner who is not contributing or who is disengaged then that's like a blind spot of the energy in the room'*

Another feature described by observing tutors was how an 'outstanding' teacher would deviate considerably from a session plan because of that teacher's own sensitivity to the relational aspect of the teaching and learning process. This echoed comments about 'flexibility and responsiveness' from the Consortium tutors' focus group and also Ofsted's key aspects of outstanding lessons (Ofsted 2009). However this was brought to life by the description of one observing tutor. The trainee teacher in this description 'read' the responses of the learners and adjusted her approach:

*'At times she didn't stick to her lesson plan, she diverted, but she was able to adapt really quickly and seamlessly to the situation whilst meeting the learning outcomes. And as soon as a couple of them became disruptive she launched into a practical thing. And she just had that adaptability. She was completely flexible.....her differentiation was outstanding.....every learner was learning, every learner was engaged, and none of the learners wanted to go to break'.*

Again the observer was considering the impact the teacher had on the learners and evidence that the learners were engaged. However the tutor recognised the signs that the teacher was responding and adjusting their activities very quickly in response to individuals in the group. Hence the teacher is both teaching the group, but differentiating between members of that group at the same time – complex and high level skills.

### **5.3.3 Observing tutor as 'teacher', looking for signs that the trainee has learned**

Section 5.1 referred to trainee identities as both teacher and learner. However the data also showed how observing tutors adopted different identities in the observation process. Whereas some observing tutors focussed initially on the trainee in their teaching role, other tutors described how their first concern was with the trainee as learner:

*'The first thing... I was particularly looking for is that (trainee name) ... had actually taken on board any of the constructive suggestions that were made in order to make the presentation of that session better'*

Here the observing tutor was acting more in their identity as a teacher seeing if their 'student' had learned. The tutor looked for signs that the trainee had moved on from previous observations and was using this learning to 'feed forward' (Mutch, 2003) into improving their teaching. This was considered a strong aspect of 'outstanding' performance and indicates the way in which a trainee's 'potential' to be 'outstanding' might be confirmed or contradicted as a result of seeing if they had learned and developed.

If the trainee is learning about teaching, part of this may be due to the quality of the tutor feedback they are receiving. An important component of this is the trainee understanding and acting on the feedback they have been given. Tutors used the trainee's performance in an observed session to check whether the trainee had acted on previous tutor comments. Here tutors described looking for different signs of development. During the observed teaching within the research project, one tutor looked at whether a trainee had developed more confidence in teaching since the previous observation; another tutor looked at whether more technical classroom skills were demonstrated.

*'One thing that I was looking for was ....that she'd taken on board some of the things we discussed at her first observation'*

In these examples, it is evident that the observing tutor is looking at the trainee both as teacher and as learner and uses both dimensions to form a judgement on the 'potential' to be 'outstanding' as well as the actual performance of that trainee.

This indicates the strong developmental aspect of Certificate in Education/PGCE observations and the tutor/trainee relationship which may underpin the observed teaching. The 'relational' nature of the feedback process is not just about the tutor 'giving' feedback - a didactic teaching model - but is part of an ongoing teaching and learning dialogue with the trainee - a constructivist teaching model. In this process the observing tutor is acting as a 'teacher', helping the trainee to construct new knowledge about teaching and coaching them to develop their skills further.

Thinking back to the different purposes of observation, the tutor's 'teaching' role is entirely appropriate as long as the observation is formative and developmental, but problems may arise if the observation needs to measure standards of practice. In that case the observing tutor's role is that of an assessor judging what standards have been met.

#### **5.3.4 Observing tutor as 'connoisseur' and 'learner'**

In the process of describing the characteristics of 'outstanding' teaching, observing tutors shifted into different identities during the observation process. Although the standard in-service Certificate in Education/PGCE observation proforma provided a structure and some

kind of objective focus to what was being observed, tutors also described the experience subjectively, wanting to feel caught up in the learning experience:

*'What I'm looking for is really to be engaged, to be inspired'*

Here the observing tutor seemed more a 'connoisseur' of the teaching process, an 'expert' wanting to revel in the experience of wonderful teaching. The characteristics of engaging and inspiring learners were considered important by all tutors, but here the observing tutor described almost 'willing' the trainee to enthuse the tutor as well as their students. One tutor articulated this as an appreciation of the 'aesthetic' of teaching. Tutors described becoming totally engaged when observing high quality teaching. In this process they moved between being an assessor, a teacher (of the trainee) and a connoisseur of good practice. However possibly the strongest sign of 'outstanding teaching' was when the observing tutor became so absorbed that they could not tear themselves away, in spite of over-running into their own time. This seemed the most profound sign of 'outstanding' teaching – when the observing tutor actually moved into the role of 'learner', entranced by what was being taught:

*'I stayed two and a half hours because I just needed to see. And I thought "I'm a student, I've gone into that role of student" and I couldn't go home because I wanted to see the ending, I needed to see the conclusion. It's as if she'd built up this....it were like reading a really good novel. She started it off really well and it was exciting, it had everything.'*

What was evident from tutors' comments was that the term 'teaching performance' with, as one tutor put it, echoes of the 'firework display' put on to impress, did not necessarily correspond to 'outstanding' teaching:

*'I observed somebody last week who is very quiet and she's not the most academic of students, she's good in the group but she lets everybody else interact, she's not dominant in any way. And....I'd only been in her lesson half an hour and I thought "she's absolutely outstanding". Something....you have to sort of....I go in and I have to feel a lesson and I usually know.'*

Interestingly, in this case the trainee did not appear to have the characteristics of an 'outstanding' learner as identified in the focus group case studies, nor did she manifest signs of being a 'teacher' in her low key presence within her course peer group. However in the actual teaching context, the tutor described becoming attuned to the subtle, 'silent' pedagogical skills, highly sensitive to students' responses and needs (Ollin, 2008) manifested by the trainee, which slowly signalled to the tutor that this was 'outstanding' teaching.

### **5.3.5 Observing tutors' notions of 'outstanding'**

When discussing their ideas on 'outstanding' teaching, all observing tutors discussed how the nature of students and the context of teaching would be taken into account in their

judgements. Although the specific effects of teaching context will be considered in Section 6 of this report, all tutors emphasised the importance of the teacher using a style relevant to the learners and learning context. The relevance of this style would be measured mainly by the level of positive response and engagement of students. All tutors emphasised the importance of the trainee's own joy in teaching and learning, communicated to their learners, together with a central focus on helping learners to learn were essential. As one tutor put it:

*'... 'outstanding' comes down to the enthusiasm, the innovation, their ability to actually inspire and motivate the learners. And inherent in that is their ability to be extremely effective in helping learners to learn'*

An aspect of 'outstanding' teaching emphasised by some tutors was the trainee's ability to plan. This was also identified in the case studies from the Consortium tutors' focus group. In observations tutors would look for evidence of planning which met the observer's expectations of what the learners might be expected to achieve in that taught session. They would also look for evidence that the trainee had planned for differentiation and inclusion, and had embedded literacy and numeracy, although it was unclear as to whether this was more a recognition of government priorities than their own notions of 'outstanding'. However it was the symbolic significance of good planning that seemed to be most important in tutors' comments. A trainee who *'takes planning seriously'*, who plans meaningfully *'nothing that's tokenistic'* and who puts the *'learner not the teacher'* at the centre of the planning process, signals much more than the completion of documents:

*'Good planning is a key indication that the trainee is committed and prepared to engage at a deep level with what they will teach and how learners will learn it in the most effective way'*

However, other tutors placed far less emphasis on good planning as an indication of 'outstanding' performance, emphasising areas such as innovative practice, excellent relationships with students or stimulating approaches. Although overall, the views on 'outstanding' teaching expressed by the observing tutors were similar to those represented within the case studies, this illustrates the interplay between the individual tutor's own preferences and interests and the views of the wider community of practice.

However in tutors' descriptions of what they would judge 'outstanding' when observing, the quality of the actual teaching and planning would not be the only factor. As indicated previously in this report, the qualities of the trainee as 'learner', would also be taken into account. The tutor would look for a number of signs that the learner was actively seeking to develop and was taking steps to improve their performance.

Tutors suggested that the quality of the trainee's preparatory sheet for observation (TP1) not only indicated the depth of analysis of students' needs, but indicated the specific feedback the

trainee wanted to improve their teaching. If non-existent, or vague this could signal lack of engagement in the development process; if detailed and specific, especially if building on previous observation feedback, this would signal the trainee as an active learner, prepared to look in depth at how to develop. Interestingly some tutors put more emphasis on the quality of this TP1 preparatory sheet than the TP3 where trainees reflect on their learning from the observed teaching. The reason given was that the TP1 showed the trainee's capacity to 'feed forward' (Mutch, 2003) actions from the previous observations into the current observation. Underpinning the quality of this documentation was the importance attached to signals that the trainee had learned from previous formative feedback. This was of special interest to tutors who had conducted earlier observations, in that trainees were showing evidence of learning from previous feedback. This also validated the tutors' own effectiveness as a teacher. The developmental nature of the observation process for Certificate in Education/PGCE tutors meant that trainees as learners needed to take their learning seriously and use it for their development as teachers:

*'That for me was a potential for an outstanding student, because they're not dismissive of things, they listen to you, they might come back and argue - which is brilliant because I like that debate, but then they acknowledge when they've maybe been a bit wrong in the past and how they're developing'*

### **5.3.6 What would a trainee have to do to achieve a grade of outstanding?**

In the interviews following the observed session and feedback, tutors discussed what the observed trainee would have needed to have done in that session to be awarded an 'outstanding' grade. Some of these suggestions were at a 'technical' level referring to better management of the environment in terms of lighting and sound, or with producing more professional quality resources. Some were concerned with the trainee's communication skills, for example, one of the trainees was asking questions of her students but the tutor thought they were not probing or challenging enough.

*'She could have asked deeper questions "well is it fair to treat everybody exactly the same or does that lead to inequality in some cases?" That type of instant reaction to learners...the ability to think on their feet and this reflection in action and then put it into action..'*

Here the tutor was able to give an example of the kind of question that would contribute to considering a trainee 'outstanding'. This is fairly specific and easy to articulate. However the comments after the example are much harder to capture clearly. For example, using another tutor's example, it is difficult to pin down 'confidence':

*'One of the things you notice with an outstanding trainee is there is a confidence ... and the students pick up on that confidence and it spreads and there is a definite feel - it's not the only thing you would grade an outstanding but there is a definite feel.'*

As in earlier comments on 'outstanding' performance, it is interesting that the tutor talks about a 'feel' to a session where the teacher is confident in what they do. The tutor is discussing this from the point of view of an expert teacher who has internalised many aspects of high quality performance. However this can be difficult to articulate in terms of specific guidance for a trainee – how can a trainee be taught to develop 'confidence' and 'presence'?

Another example of indicating broader, but more complex areas for development concerned the way a trainee worked with a group of students. Here there was general reference to inclusion and interactivity:

*'...achieve more inclusion and interactivity between tutor and students, and students and students.'*

Another tutor identified the need for a trainee to increase their sensitivity to their learners. In the interview, this tutor re-enacted the essence of the 'message' to the trainee who had just been observed:

*'...take yourself completely out of the equation and look at it from the perspective of "what are all your learners doing". Because it doesn't matter if you're whiz, bang, doing this that and the other at the front if they're not. So I think there needs to be more engagement of all the learners, more participation equally from all'*

All of these examples seem informed by a notion of 'outstanding' teaching and a major skill of observing tutor is to illustrate to a trainee best practice through giving practical examples of how to improve. Even though the tutor has an idea of what the trainee would have to do to be 'outstanding', the more complex the aspect of teaching and learning being considered, the harder it might be for both tutor and trainee to make this explicit and 'action plan' to carry development forward. 'Outstanding' teaching is more than the sum of its parts.

### **5.3.7 Trainee's potential to be 'outstanding'**

Ofsted make a point of using the term 'potential' to be outstanding, to indicate the difference between a trainee developing their expertise and an experienced teacher. Observing tutors discussed what would indicate to them that a trainee had the 'potential' to be 'outstanding'. They identified many of the same characteristics to indicate 'potential' as those used to describe a trainee who was already considered 'outstanding'. However, some tutors suggested that potential might be identified even before observing the trainee in the classroom:

*'How they interact with their colleagues, their enthusiasm for the job, really chomping at the bit and want to be in there and they want to get stuck in...'*

This illustrated a distinction between an actual teaching performance and signs of a trainee's overall potential to be 'outstanding' as a teacher, which might also include a trainee's ability to learn from feedback. Potential might be identified early on in a course and the term could be meaningful at that point. However, apart from a feeling that a trainee might be 'one to watch', tutors made little distinction between 'potential' and 'actual' performance. Their comments indicated that the 'potential' needed to be demonstrated in a tangible way to justify being considered 'outstanding'. In other words, the trainee could be incredibly enthusiastic as a learner outside the classroom, but this needed to be translated into high quality classroom practice. For in-service trainees who are also college employees, the notion of potential is even more confusing, as their students will not be interested in their 'potential' as a teacher, but in the 'actual' quality of their teaching.

## 6. Effect of different teaching contexts on judgements of 'outstanding'

Recent research on the FE sector has highlighted the impact of the learning context on the way teaching is conducted, suggesting the constraints and preferred approaches linked to particular learning contexts:

*'..the location and resources of the learning site which are not neutral, but enable some approaches and attitudes, and constrain or prevent others' (Hodkinson et al, 2007, p.399)*

This section considers participants' views on whether teaching and learning contexts can affect how 'outstanding' is understood by tutors and whether the context may limit the potential of trainees to achieve an 'outstanding' grade. It begins by considering a range of different contexts and then considers teaching in a particular context, HE in FE to indicate the kind of factors which might influence tutors' judgements of 'outstanding' teaching.

### 6.1 Range of teaching contexts

All participants described observing across a range of teaching contexts including FE colleges, adult and community learning, work-based learning, fire, police, health, armed services and private training. Some tutors felt the context had little influence on whether they judged a trainee's teaching as outstanding or not. These tutors believed they applied the same internalised criteria to judgements in one context as to judgements in another. However other tutors believed the context, including the types of learners, did influence their judgements. In their discussions they described the different types of teaching valued in specific teaching and learning cultures:

*'You do recognise certain patterns or trends of delivery styles associated loosely with different types of contexts, like HE in FE, or out in the workplace, or some church hall hired to deliver a certain type of teaching and learning'*

The nature of the learners would also be different:

*'I would expect, ...teachers to be different in different contexts because of the different nature of the learning group'*

Sometimes the quality of the learners would raise the quality of a teacher's performance:

*'Sometimes a teacher will just have a really good group who require very little input. they can make for themselves a very good lesson with sometimes minimum input from the teacher.'*

One tutor suggested that a trainee might be considered 'outstanding' in cultures where there is little training for teachers. Typically, these would be organisations with a public purpose unrelated to education, such as the army.

*'Sometimes it's purely practical skills like drills and it has to be done in a military style, there's not much scope for a humanist approach .....I've got a lot of people that teach literacy and numeracy and the key skills elements to the Army and they get 40 soldiers into the classroom and most of them have Army backgrounds as well and they're used to shouting at students.'*

The tutor suggested that if the trainee were to teach in a college using skills valued in the army, judgements on their teaching might be very different. Ideally Certificate in Education/PGCE trainees would be observed in a range of different contexts to see how they adapted to the needs of the learners, but, as tutors pointed out, there were often limited possibilities to do this. The issue then is whether the quality of teaching is judged more on appropriateness for context rather than with certain generic expectations, such as a wide variety of delivery methods and considerable learner participation. In other words, does the observing tutor manage their expectations according to the values and priorities of a particular learning culture? This will be considered in more detail in a later section when discussing FE and HE/FE observations.

Other contexts mentioned specifically were prison education and adult and community learning:

*'In the prison the person that we observed not so long since, she said "90% of my class are here because they're locked up 24 hours a day and if they come to my class it's because they can have 1 hour drawing - they don't really want to be artists but it gets them out of their room".'*

The prison context had an effect on the type of resources available:

*'If I go into a prison, straightaway I know I'm not going to find a teacher using a digital camera, the internet, a projector, all these kinds of things. So very quickly the context has a very.....a large effect really.'*

The prison environment also inhibited a trainee's flexibility and responsiveness:

*'Trainees who work in secure environments such as the local prisons, ... work on very tight constraints in terms of spontaneity, access to materials and so on.'*

Tutors also suggested that the teaching context affected the type of delivery methods used:

*'it doesn't necessarily affect how I judge the session but I think it influences heavily how the session is delivered'*

A number of tutors used community education as an example where a particular teaching approach was appropriate, where learners were often vulnerable and professional boundaries needed to be drawn.

*'In community teaching tutors often need to be supportive, nurturing..... I think that if you actually challenged a lot of people in the voluntary community then they would feel threatened and worried by that.....often they've come along and it's not for the academic challenge, they've come along because they've got to do a course to do with specific things they've done in the community.'*

This can be contrasted with the discussion on HE in FE in a later section, where challenge would be an integral component in 'outstanding' teaching, but where 'nurturing' would not be a valued part of the culture.

The potential limitations of Ofsted standards were discussed in the context of the less formal types of teaching in community contexts:

*'These standards are being set by OFSTED are for an organised, structured learning environment, they're not for an environment which is effectively people volunteering, coming in in their own time in a relaxed environment to learn at their own pace, at their own time with no structured classroom base activity happening.'*

Tutors discussed whether the context affected their judgements of a trainee's teaching. Some tutors suggested they would look for the same features wherever they observed:

*'I would still look for the same thing, the relationship, the structure'*

They indicated that certain generic components of 'outstanding teaching' would be evident whatever the subject:

*'I would expect to see the features of 'outstanding' in Motor Vehicle and in HE or GCSE Sociology, I would be looking for the same things to make that judgement'*

However, other tutors suggested that context did affect the ability of a trainee to be considered 'outstanding' because certain elements would be missing which would affect the tutor's judgement. One tutor gave the example of a drop in centre, where students came and went, there was little continuity and it was difficult for the trainee to be learner-centred in their planning because they did not know who would turn up that day.

*'(context) does affect it a lot but I am still trying to be objective and see what would be suitable in that environment and judge it by that'*

In this situation, a trainee may also be limited in their opportunities to build up a relationship with a group over a period of time, due to the changing student population. This could disadvantage them in comparison with a trainee being observed in another context with ample opportunities of build up good tutor/student interaction. Another example of a less-structured learning environment was the 'workshop' type of class, which might not provide the

opportunities for the type of teacher input and range of learner activities which might signal 'outstanding' performance. Here more subtle teaching strategies might not be recognised:

*'Facilitating could be outstanding teaching – but the issue is that the teacher might be seen to be doing very little'*

The constraints on a trainee's ability to be judged 'outstanding' through teaching in a particular context was illustrated by tutors' comments on evidence of planning learning sessions. One tutor expressed a 'generic' position in relation to judgements on the quality of teaching:

*'it doesn't matter to me what context anybody is teaching in, the planning should be there, the use of different methods of teaching, the engagement of the learners'*

However, other tutors identified constraints on planning caused by trainees having to use ineffective organisational planning documents:

*'For example, today, the planning template that the student used was only satisfactory, well only allowed her to be satisfactory - not even good - she used it well enough so I think she could have used it better, but it did not give her the opportunity to do justice to her practice, her practice was good and the planning could only show me a satisfactory teacher'*

The ability to create detailed meaningful session plans was identified as a characteristic of 'outstanding' teaching in the Consortium tutors' case studies and by some of the observing tutors. This trainee's constraints on developing a high quality plan, through having to use a prescribed template could limit her potential for 'outstanding' performance and provides an example of how contextual factors might affect a trainee's ability to achieve.

## **6.2 Particular characteristics of teaching HE in FE**

The previous section considered the potential effect of culture and context on a trainee's capacity to demonstrate outstanding teaching. Using HE in FE as an example of a specific context, this section considers what Certificate in Education/PGCE tutors understand to be the characteristics of teaching in that context. When observing trainees teaching HE in FE do their notions of 'outstanding' teaching differ from purely FE observations?

### **6.2.1 HE in FE cultures**

The majority of colleges in which the observing tutors worked had separate HE centres which were in the process of developing an HE ethos to their work. One tutor described the separate HE centre which had a lock on the door so the FE students could not enter - only the HE students had access. Tutors described how the HE centres worked to develop a distinctive culture and ethos which differentiated their teaching from the rest of the FE college.

They indicate an essential difference between FE and HE in FE teaching. In the HE class the student has paid to attend and the tutor implied that this not only increased student expectations of the standards of the course, but also gave them more 'consumer power' to do something about it:

*'So there's a very different dynamic in that class to someone who has paid £800 to do an HE course isn't there?'*

A particular area where differences between FE and HE in FE emerged was in the use of learning outcomes and session plans. Some tutors described how the HE centres in their colleges used different session plans to the rest of the FE college.

*'The feeling was that the FE lesson plan involved putting on large amounts of information each week, or each session, which weren't actually particularly relevant or which could be taken as read.'*

The HE/FE session plans had much broader learning outcomes, if they appeared at all:

*'Because HE in FE is not 'Ofsteded' there is a lot of resistance to session plans with tight learning objectives'*

Sessions also had a looser structure, often based around a fairly didactic view of teaching, with lecturing being a favoured style 'more appropriate' to HE teaching:

*'The expectation is the learners will go away with that information-rich delivery and do something with it, rather than do something with it in the classroom, so that there is a beginning, middle and an end.'*

In general teaching approaches were based on the idea that adults studying HE should be able to take responsibility for their learning and some tutors described how evidence (or lack of evidence) for this would affect their judgements as to whether a session was 'outstanding' or not. However the supposition of student autonomy in HE was not always seen as positive by the observing tutor. Tutors discussed teacher-led sessions in the HE class, often in the form of lectures, which acted as 'symbolic markers' of 'HE-ness' (Jones, 2006). However these could occur at the expense of using the wide range of teaching and learning strategies and structured plans for delivery encouraged on the Certificate in Education/PGCE programme.

*'There are aspects that seem to be different ..in most of the HE in FE classes that I've observed it's very tutor-led... So although the tutor's working very hard there is a lack of acknowledgement of different teaching and learning strategies that might help the learners in their approach to their studies...'*

This is an example of where the trainee may be conforming to a particular 'culture' of teaching as encouraged by the HE in FE centre but in doing so is limiting their range of strategies. But

does the observing tutor judge according to the conventions of the culture or to a broader notion of what constitutes 'outstanding' teaching'? For example, would there be an expectation that an 'outstanding' teacher would use whatever strategies were at their disposal to meet the needs of their students? If so, would an 'HE' culture which was biased towards lectures disadvantage trainees being observed on a Certificate in Education/PGCE course? These mixed messages could also be confusing for trainees who taught both FE and HE in FE, as the trainees themselves would need to 'flip' between cultures (Jones, 2006).

### 6.2.2 Observing tutors' expectations of HE in FE teaching

There were many aspects of 'outstanding' teaching which related to all contexts – enthusiasm for and knowledge of the subject, the ability to inspire and motivate students and excellent relational skills were aspects identified by all observing tutors. Some tutors believed that they would make the same judgements irrespective of context, however most tutors had specific expectations and notions of 'outstanding' for this type of teaching. One tutor suggested:

*'I would expect the standards to be a lot higher if one is teaching an HE programme in an FE environment because the level and ability of the students, the expectations, is a lot higher'*

It is unclear here whether the tutor is discussing standards of teaching or standards of content. However most tutors had higher expectations in the level of subject knowledge of the trainee and the level of subject content of the session being observed than their expectations of trainees in other contexts:

*'The subject knowledge needs to be deeper, you need to have more of a reserve, more is expected of you and you may have more challenge.'*

Another tutor talked about expecting an HE session to be different from observations in other settings, with different expectations of what would be observed in terms of the trainee teacher's own challenge to the students:

*'If it's an HE class I expect some form of criticality, some critical evaluation going on within that, some deeper level thinking, maybe some philosophical debates somehow interwoven with it, and I wouldn't expect that in, say for example, an E to E class or in other sectors.'*

This implied that a trainee would not be considered 'outstanding' in the HE context if these components were not present, however, in a FE class concerned with entry to employment (E to E) those components could be missing entirely and an 'outstanding' session could still be observed.

In highlighting characteristics of HE in FE teaching, some tutors gave examples of the differences in teaching FE to HE in FE.

*'The FE environment has more specific ideas about inclusive practice issues and looking at different strategies for mixing the group up, using different types of thinking and problem solving skills, creative and innovative ways of teaching and learning, ...there'd be more visual stimuli perhaps in an FE....the tutor would be making up laminated cards and all sorts of different types of kinaesthetic activities that would help students engage with the learning process.'*

This suggests some characteristics which might be expected in an 'outstanding' session in FE, which may not necessarily be expected in an 'outstanding' session in HE in FE.

Tutors showed awareness of the effect of external factors on the nature of the teaching approach. For example, they identified that FE teaching involved a higher level of teacher direction of the learning process, but also was subject to more assessment and accountability:

*'With a lot of HE it should be... about people's attitudes, people's reflection, things which cannot easily be measured, and ...the thrust of the FE lesson plan has been on what can be measured, what can be controlled'*

This comment implies very different views of education underpinning HE and FE. A detailed session plan in FE, based on the tight 'measurable' and 'achievable' outcomes favoured by Ofsted, also provides evidence for QA and inspection. However the inspectorial process is different for HE in FE tutors. Trainees teaching FE would be subject to Ofsted inspections, whereas HE in FE tutors would be subject to Integrated Quality and Enhancement Reviews (IQER) run by the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA). This means that trainees in FE would be subject to teaching observations in preparation for, and by Ofsted; trainees in HE in FE would not. This indicates how observing tutors may also need to take into account the requirements of different stakeholders in determining 'outstanding' teaching in a particular context. This might also influence how trainees view Certificate in Education/PGCE observations, in particular the use of grading of teaching performance:

*'It's more your FE tutors who want to know the OFSTED grades because it's certainly of more relevance to them and a lot of the HE tutors never ask for it because they're never going to be bothered by OFSTED so they're not that interested.'*

## **7 Tutor feedback on observed teaching**

Previous sections have considered observing tutors' views on 'outstanding' teaching and the ways that teaching context might affect the ways that 'outstanding' teaching might be conceived. Tutors have also indicated how context might affect the trainee's ability to demonstrate 'outstanding' teaching in an observed session. The next section is concerned with tutors' judgements following observations and explores how tutors' views on the purpose of observation can affect how judgements are formed and feedback is given. This is of relevance when considering the implications of 'grading' terms which represent a measure of the standard of teaching performance at a particular the time and place – in this case the time and place of the observed teaching session.

The research showed that all tutors followed established processes of giving feedback immediately following observations, giving space for the trainee to self-evaluate and engaging in developmental dialogue with the trainee. All but one of the tutors used the headings in the standard observation proforma during feedback, but usually after more general feedback had occurred. The exception was a part-time tutor involved solely in the observation of teaching and not tutor input on the consortium ITE programme. Tutors identified strengths and areas for development in discussion with the trainee, but did not develop specific action plans with trainees to take forward the points for development. The importance of action planning has been signalled in the DfES (2004) report on ITT within LSS and has been recommended as good practice elsewhere (Harvey, 2006). One tutor identified the trainee's own capability for action planning as a factor in considering them 'outstanding', suggesting that the trainee is able to take responsibility for this process:

*'Where I've seen people I think have got the potential to be outstanding is those that fully appreciate and acknowledge the comments that have been made by the observer but put in a clear action plan of how they're actually going to address that'*

Previous sections have highlighted the different identities suggested from the data, of both observing tutor and trainee. This example indicated the importance placed by the tutor on the trainee's capacity to be an active and autonomous learner, driving forward their own development as a teacher.

### **7.1 Use of language in feedback**

Tutors were very supportive in their approach to feedback, with a strong focus on development and motivation. However tutors experienced a conflict between being supportive of a trainee, so that they help them to develop, and being honest, by giving them an indication of the standard the tutor thinks they have achieved in that session.

*'One of the difficult things for me, coming back into it, is actually to verbalise and find the right words that encapsulate the standards that we're trying to ...make them robust enough that people can take those comments and move forward with them.'*

Thinking back to the purposes of observation, the tutor here is describing the tension between a tutor's role in assessing and assuring standards of teaching, and the tutor's identity as a teacher of the trainee. Although teaching, learning and assessment overlap (Black et al, 2003), especially in the realms of formative assessment, in the context of this research the bias towards a 'teaching' role is held to emphasise learning and development – a bias towards an 'assessor role is held to emphasise measurement of standards.

An understanding of tensions between the purpose of observations to measure standards and their purpose in developing a trainee's potential as a teacher is fundamental when considering the grading of observations on ITE programmes. This issue was highlighted in tutors' oral and written feedback to trainees.

#### **7.1.1 Oral feedback**

Tutors were expansive in their approach to oral feedback which they saw as formative, dialogic and motivational:

*'It's the developmental, I think that we should be providing far more encouragement, far more "this is where you are and this is where you need to be".'*

There was a strong desire to encourage and motivate, with an emphasis on the importance of ensuring that trainees took away positive points about their teaching:

*'I always start with the question "what did they feel about the session" and then I try and go into the good points and then put in the odd development points.'*

This tutor placed an emphasis on using the observation to develop the trainee's confidence and to build up a relationship of trust between observing tutor and trainee. At this stage, this is perceived as even more important than focussing on development. This may be a strategy that an observing tutor would use early on in an ITE programme, although would be less appropriate for a trainee in the later stages of a course. Hence different observation strategies and different purposes of observation could operate at different times in a course. At present these are decided by the observing tutor, but it could be an area where the Consortium might develop explicit guidelines.

In their feedback, observing tutors described using a range of skills to motivate the trainee and help them learn from the experience: For example, they would use questions to try and develop trainees as autonomous and active learners:

*'What I tend to do is do a lot via questions because I do feel that the development points are great but I also think that a challenging question on there can make them think a lot and go back and research it and see "now what could I do".'*

Here the tutor operated in a 'teaching' rather than an 'assessing' role, using a particular strategy to make the trainee think more deeply about their practice.

### **7.1.2 Written feedback**

Analysis of the written feedback on the teaching observation form showed considerable variance between tutors in the style of feedback, with different types of emphasis in the feedback given. Some tutors described what they had seen, giving evidence of where certain skills were demonstrated; some mixed description with comment. Some tutors addressed the trainee's request for feedback, but others did not address this directly.

Similar to the oral feedback, the written feedback reflected a tutor bias towards observation as a developmental process, demonstrated by using the observation to teach and develop the trainee. Some tutors indicated that they wanted to use written as well as oral feedback in a motivational way, highlighting positive aspects of a trainee's performance:

*'So on the sheet for feedback where it says strengths and developmental areas I always put the same amount, or more positive.'*

On analysis of the written feedback (TP2) sheets completed by tutors, this positive approach was evident, as in this example of feedback:

*'This was a well-prepared session. Your planning and preparation were good with clear aims and objectives. Lesson outcomes were challenging with strategies in place to keep the students focussed and on task. Your approach was always positive and encouraging and this generated a good atmosphere in the class.'*

However, although there were examples of summative judgement, observing tutors tended to be fairly sparing in their use of unambiguously evaluative terms, often using more neutral terms like 'interesting', 'appropriate', 'relevant' rather than more 'absolute' terms like 'good'. This may indicate that tutors felt that the session was not to a 'good' standard, but were using relatively non-judgemental terms as encouragement for the trainee. Even when evaluative terms such as 'good' were used, there was potential ambiguity in how these could be understood.

As a small test of whether this was the case, at the presentation of this research at the Consortium network conference, Consortium tutors in the audience (n=40) were asked to comment on their understandings of the following examples of written tutor feedback from

TP2 documents used in the research. The examples from written feedback, followed by Consortium tutors' comments are given below:

Example: *'Body language was positive and you displayed an air of confidence in your presentation. Good.'*

Comments: Here 'good' could have meant – 'good, you've reached a standard'/'good, you've learned from the previous observation'/'good – I like what you're doing'

*'Demonstrated a good subject understanding and knowledge of subject being taught. Asked if not sure. Much better. Well done'*

Comments: Here 'good' seems to comment on a standard expected (but is the tutor a subject specialist?) 'much better, well done' indicate the trainee has developed from last time' but there is no indication of standard.

The different ways that Consortium tutors were able to interpret these written feedback comments signals a problem that trainees might also experience. This might not be a problem if the trainee wants to use the feedback purely for development. However if they want to have a clear idea of the standard of their teaching, ambiguity in language will be unhelpful.

Tutors identified different development points on the summary front sheet of the observation form. Some examples of development points were:

- *'Formulate more specific objectives for all learners and consider all domains of learning'*
- *'Develop the use of Q&A throughout the session to challenge learners and enhance development'*
- *'Set a time for each task. Tell your students how long they have'*
- *'Try and get your students to all sit together. Encourage integration'*
- *'It may be a good idea to allocate different roles to students when they are working in groups – just so that the same few 'characters' do not dominate'*
- *'How about asking for responses from 'named' learners – just to make sure that the whole class has the opportunity to participate'*
- *'Pacey verbal delivery style - could be slowed down slightly'*

Some tutors used questions to prompt the trainee to think for themselves:

- *'Other than Q&A and discussion - can you think of any other formative assessment opportunities or differentiated classroom activities that would engage the whole class?'*

Some tutors offered extension activities in their points for development:

- *'Aims and objectives on the lesson plan could benefit from some development to ensure a differentiated approach and measurability'* (TUTOR THEN RECOMMENDS A WEBSITE TO HELP)
- *'Have you seen the new TDA music website?'* (TUTOR GIVES WEB ADDRESS)

There were also instances where the tutor explicitly taught 'content' within the feedback:

*'Inclusive learning is all the things you do to provide a welcoming environment to all learners. So it includes, but is not limited to, the additional support, learning needs of students.'*

These approaches to feedback are highly appropriate for teaching observations where the purpose is developmental and formative, however it is useful to consider how far they give a trainee an indication of the standard they have achieved or an overview of what is needed to achieve 'outstanding' teaching.

### **7.1.3 Feedback specific to HE/FE teaching context**

In spite of tutors showing a high level of sensitivity to the nuances of teaching context during the research interview, only a small proportion of tutors directly addressed the notion of HE level teaching in their feedback. One tutor explicitly framed her feedback in terms of context:

*'What I observed and will further reflect on is the appropriateness of your teaching style to Higher Education.'*

Another tutor explicitly mentioned what was needed when teaching an HE course:

*'Good – you stress the need to make links with theory and practice which is essential at this level. This is a vocational HE course, so needs to discuss the actual vocation.'*

Here the tutor is clearly signalling to the trainee aspects which would improve their practice as an 'HE' teacher.

One tutor supported the trainee's explanation about the fairly broad structure of the session plan by relating this to the context and type of learners:

*'The caveat about the precise content and timings of the session is particularly appropriate to this HE session, where learners are clearly self directed.'*

In this instance the tutor was clearly adapting expectations in terms of session planning to the perceived culture of the teaching context. An interesting issue here is whether this trainee might have the potential to be judged 'outstanding' in this context, in spite of a vague session plan. This type of plan would limit their potential to be judged outstanding in an FE session, where more structure and direction might be expected.

Although all tutors mentioned subject knowledge – it is a category on the observation proforma – comments to trainees did not address this explicitly in terms of HE level teaching. Instead comments were fairly general:

*'You have a really good level of subject specialist knowledge- Don't be afraid to give examples and mention this.'*

*'Subject specialist pedagogy utilised well.'*

Here it would be useful to explore what would signal 'outstanding' subject knowledge in an 'HE' context.

In the research interviews tutors discussed the notion of challenge and criticality in HE teaching. The notion of 'challenge' was mentioned by two tutors:

*'Challenging visual and auditory material.'*

With two examples directly linked to higher level work:

*'Technical and subject specific delivery challenged learners- higher order taxonomy cognitive learning.'*

*'What type of visual materials could be used to help with high level cognitive processing?'*

In the second example, the tutor was modelling a dialogic approach to feedback where the trainee is encouraged to develop ideas for themselves and take some responsibility for engaging with the substance of the tutor's comments. As a tutor on an HE programme of ITE, the tutor was also modelling an appropriate style of teaching for an HE context. The tutor was also signalling aspects of teaching HE - high level cognitive processing - which they would expect to see when judging the quality of teaching in this context.

Of interest is whether the trainee would read these as general cues about how to improve their overall approach to teaching in the HE context, or just as itemised suggestions for 'technical' improvements. In a feedback process which has development as its central purpose, the engagement of the trainee is crucial and mechanisms for promoting more dialogue are important. The trainee and the tutor not only need to develop shared understandings of the language used, but also what the best teaching 'looks like' and how the trainee can measure themselves against this standard. Considering ways of developing this dialogic approach and involving more trainee self-assessment would be a productive area for future development Consortium tutors.

#### 7.1.4 Trainees' understanding of tutor feedback

The relational aspect of feedback as dialogue between tutor and trainee is an important aspect of the development process following observations. All tutors demonstrated a thorough, supportive and conscientious approach to feedback and, wherever time permitted, made considerable effort to discuss issues arising from the observation with trainees. However, when asked, most tutors did not believe that the trainee would be clear about the tutor's view of their standard of teaching. One exception to this was a tutor also involved in college observation for QTL who asked the trainee to informally grade their performance. Although this observation was for the Certificate in Education/PGCE course, that member of staff was also a college employee. However neither trainee nor tutor appeared uncomfortable with the process, although the fact that the trainee and the tutor agreed that the observation was 'good' may have made this easier.

One tutor highlighted how the TP2 observation documentation steered them away from being more explicit about the standard of teaching observed.

*'I would hope that my feedback, both written and verbal, would highlight the strengths and would give them opportunities to recognise areas that could be further developed but I'm not necessarily sure that my feedback on the forms that we're currently working on would illustrate outstanding, good or satisfactory.'*

The current observation feedback forms, based on a pass/fail system require the tutor to confirm whether the session has/has not met a satisfactory standard. The introduction of the Ofsted criteria has meant that the word 'satisfactory' is fraught with meaning, and this will be considered in a later section. However in terms of assurance of standards, it is important to clarify for trainees whether the observation can be failed. Trainees' perceptions from previous research (Burrows, 2008) indicated that some thought it was impossible to fail an observation. In terms of the tutor bias towards the developmental purposes of observation, it would be useful to explore tutors' summative judgements of trainees' teaching performance in more detail.

Tutor reservations about being explicit may have other reasons than the limitations of the observation proforma. Some tutors described how they tried to avoid giving grades to trainees who ask for them. One reason given was the supportive observation model used in the Certificate in Education/PGCE. A tutor contrasted this with the internal college QA system:

*'I get this constantly back from my own trainees, they far more appreciate the model that we use through Cert. Ed. PGCE because the model that our organisation uses for internal inspections ....- they just feel they're beaten up by those OTLs.'* [observation of teaching and learning]

In the light of some trainees' identities as college employees as well as learners on an ITE programme, the tutors' comments indicated that some trainees strongly appreciate a developmental approach to observation. This is in contrast to a college system of QA of teaching linked to summative judgements of performance and perceived by some trainees as stressful. However, as the previous section highlighted, trainees may have difficulty understanding statements which are sometimes ambiguous about their standard of teaching. The difference between the Certificate in Education/PGCE observation and a college observation may be significant for that reason. However, a question for the Consortium to consider is whether trainees need to have a clear sense of their standard of teaching relative to others in order to develop their aspirations towards the highest quality of teaching.

## 7.2 Grading issues and use of Ofsted terms

Tutors were acutely aware of the implications of their use of language in both oral, but especially written feedback to trainees. When asked whether they made a distinction between the use of the word 'outstanding' and the word 'excellent', some tutors said they used the words interchangeably, but others made a distinction:

*'There seems to be a difference between excellent and outstanding. Outstanding is that thing that you can't pin down, it's a feeling, you get a flavour, it's something that sort of blows you away'*

For these tutors 'outstanding' meaning something exceptional - a problem when '50%' or over of trainees have to be deemed 'outstanding' in order for an ITE provider to achieve a grade 1 in Ofsted inspection.

Some tutors expressed their reluctance to give the top grade to trainees:

*'I am very, very reluctant to give a person a Grade 1 or an excellent because they've no room for improvement. It's almost saying that they're at the top and there's nowhere further they can go so they've got to be the best at whatever they do. Giving them a Grade 2 for instance and saying "you are good but there is potential for improvement" gives that person a yardstick to move on to.'*

This seems to indicate a reluctance to give a summative judgement which, in the tutor's view, could stop 'development'. However another viewpoint was that a sign of 'outstanding' is always wanting to improve:

*'If they're outstanding then they're outstanding enough to know that there is still room for improvement.'*

This comment reminds us of the focus on the trainee as 'active learner' as well as teacher in tutors' views on 'outstanding' teaching.

### 7.2.1 Impact of Ofsted grading on observations

It was clear how much Ofsted grading criteria had affected the terms used by tutors when giving feedback to trainees.

*'I'm really mindful of the criteria for the grading and that's sort of in my head really and all the time I'm looking to make that judgement .... So in my head I'm sort of correcting myself, so when I'm starting to say "that's very good" I'm thinking "well is it very good or is it good or is it outstanding?'*

This sensitivity to what one tutor called 'linguistic labels' was often due to the potential impact on a trainee:

*'I always feel as well that sometimes trainees will take the way you phrase things on your feedback sheets. If you say something is good then they will actually start equating that with a grade 2.'*

In this instance, the tutor was concerned that the trainee would equate the use of the term 'good' with a grade awarded for teaching as part of a college QA observation process. Hence the trainee would think that the Certificate in Education/PGCE tutor is making a summative assessment of their standard of teaching in the observed session which will translate to standards in the college environment. However, as discussed in a previous section, the tutor may be using the 'good' motivationally, or 'good' to indicate development from last time. This was a major consideration for all tutors. As one tutor put it:

*'So you've got all these codes really haven't you that you use, not just the Ofsted words but all sorts of codes that in your mind are equivalent to the grades.'*

This raises issues of whether the trainee has the same understanding as the tutor of the 'codes' that are used and whether an awareness of the implications of the use of Ofsted grading terms could inhibit observing tutors' readiness to use evaluative language. As tutors indicated - if a term in common usage, such as 'good' is now equated with a 'grade 2', then that word is charged with a particular meaning for both tutor and trainee.

### 7.2.2 Tensions between different trainee and tutor identities

The tensions between college grading systems for observations and observations on the Certificate in Education/PGCE is illustrated by problems related to the use of the term 'satisfactory' - another common term now co-opted into Ofsted terminology. When looking at the Ofsted criteria for ITE it is clear that this term is used to indicate that the trainee has achieved what is necessary for an ITE course i.e. QTLS standards as well as academic requirements. However the impact of the Ofsted grading system used in colleges has attached a particular stigma to this term. On the current Certificate in Education/PGCE observation proforma, tutors have to indicate whether the trainee's teaching has been

'satisfactory' or 'unsatisfactory'. If 'satisfactory', the trainee had passed the observation. However in the college environment 'satisfactory' (grade 3) has now become a reason for re-observation.

One tutor described how senior management in colleges are driving this notion:

*'Recently we were told by somebody senior that "satisfactory" didn't mean "good enough".'*

This tutor expressed the problem identified by all the observing tutors:

*"If I look at the word from a pure linguist point of view, satisfactory satisfies me so it's fine, it's satisfactory. Whereas if we get graded as satisfactory from the external company now, we have to re-do the session, so satisfactory is not satisfactory any more, if you know what I mean.'*

This tutor uses the term 'we' in this quote, because all observing tutors interviewed were also college staff and hence subject to the same college QA procedures as trainees they observed for the Certificate in Education/PGCE programme. They suggested that the use of grading on an ITE programme could put observing ITE tutors in a vulnerable position. They discussed the pressures that might be experienced from college management, when a trainee had performed badly in an Ofsted inspection. These would be especially acute for Certificate in Education/PGCE tutors who also held a college QA role in observing teaching, as they would be working to two different systems. Tutors also discussed the pressures from a trainee who wants a grade from the ITE tutor to indicate how they would be graded in college.

Discrepancies here could cause confusion and resentment: One tutor gave an example where a trainee might say:

*"Well you gave me a 1, why does OFSTED think I'm a 3?"*

A trainee would not necessarily make the distinction between 'outstanding' potential on an ITE course and 'outstanding' (grade 1) in an Ofsted college inspection:

*'they might then go off and say "oh I've got an outstanding report" and then they get inspected by Ofsted or by an internal QA one and then there is a conflict and then they don't know where they're coming from.'*

A previous section has mentioned that the notion of 'potential' is problematic and may make an untenable distinction between 'training' and 'experienced' performance. For example, the HR manager would expect a member of college staff who is a trainee to teach to the same quality as other members of staff, because '*students do not make this distinction*'; the observing ITE tutor identifying outstanding 'potential' early on in a course would expect this 'potential' to be realised in *actual* classroom performance towards the end of a course.

### 7.2.3 Informal grades awarded by tutors for observed teaching sessions

Following the co-observation and feedback to trainees, one of the interview questions asked tutors to suggest a grade they would have given the trainee on the basis of the observed session. They were asked to use the Ofsted terms of *'outstanding, good, satisfactory, inadequate'*. Out of the nine tutors, one tutor felt so strongly against grading that they would not suggest a grade.

Suggested grades	Number of tutors suggesting grade
Outstanding	N =0
Good	N =3
Satisfactory	N =5
Inadequate	N =0
No grade suggested	N =1

Two participants suggested that there were some 'good' aspects, within a 'satisfactory' session. There were no suggested grades at the extreme ends of the assessment spectrum i.e. no 'inadequate' and no 'outstanding' grades. Although the presence of a researcher may have created the tendency for observers to play safe, all observers provided full rationales for their grade decision. However it does pose the question whether the grading process for a programme seen as developmental will tend to avoid grade extremities. In the light of Ofsted requirements that over 50% trainees should show 'outstanding' potential (with most lessons deemed 'outstanding') for an institution to gain a grade 1, this could cause problems for the ITE provider. The other factor, as discussed in the previous section, might be a reluctance on the tutor's part to commit themselves to grading terms which are fraught with ambiguities, both in terms of their use as 'linguistic codes' but also in the different implications they have for trainees as learners or as college teaching staff. One tutor suggested that this also occurred in college grading systems, where some tutors were prepared to give a grade 1, but there were others who were more conservative to avoid potential disagreement:

*'Other colleagues who would rather give a 2 and have that accepted rather than fight the corner of saying "well that's definitely a 1 because of X, Y and Z".'*

### 7.2.4 Benefits of grading

In spite of the strong feelings expressed by observing tutors that observations were primarily developmental, some tutors did identify potential benefits for some use of grades. It was pointed out that some trainees actually ask for grades on the basis of preparing them for an observation by Ofsted. However, there would be problems of comparability between the ITE

and college grading systems. One tutor suggested that trainees are more likely to want a grade if they feel they've done well, otherwise what they are looking for is support and motivation from the tutor.

One tutor suggested that grading criteria could be useful because they give:

*'an opportunity to work to a set of guidelines that tells us where the person has to move on to next in order to be able to encourage that.'*

Another tutor suggested that an explicit set of criteria would help the tutor understand baseline performance and help consistency of judgement. It was also suggested that students would also benefit from being clear about what they are being graded against as they can be unclear about the basis for observation judgements. This is an area which has emerged as important from the data, and it may be useful to consider the use of grades at a small number of monitoring points during the Certificate in Education/PGCE course.

One tutor felt strongly that trainees needed to be taught how to grade themselves so that they understood the basis for judgements of standards of teaching. A previous section has discussed how developmental observations lend themselves to a dialogic approach between trainee and tutor. Here it might be possible to include more self-assessment activity for the trainee relating to their own teaching standards which could be used in dialogue with their tutor. This is an area which needs further consideration by the Consortium.

## 8 Conclusions

This research was carried out in response to the introduction of Ofsted's new grading criteria for inspection of ITE in the LSS, which state that over fifty percent of trainees need to be judged 'outstanding' for an ITE provider to achieve the highest inspection grade.

The project considered how tutors in the Huddersfield Consortium understand 'outstanding' in relation to trainee performance, with the main focus on classroom teaching. Case studies of 'outstanding' and 'weak' trainees produced by Consortium Centre managers were analysed to give a sense of how the wider 'community' of consortium tutors understood the terms. The research then considered in detail the judgements made by tutors carrying out teaching observations of trainees on the in-service Certificate in Education/PGCE. Using the specific example of a trainee they had just observed, but also drawing from their own experiences as tutors and teacher educators, tutors explored their views on 'outstanding' teaching. The observed trainees were mainly teaching in an HE in FE context and the research also considered the effect of teaching context on how 'outstanding' teaching was conceived. The process and content of tutor feedback following the observation was analysed, including tutors' views on grading and how the new Ofsted grading criteria affected their feedback. The research also considered tensions which have emerged as a result of the grading of observations for college QA systems, in particular the tensions between the developmental and judgemental purposes of teaching observation. This is particularly relevant where trainees on an ITE programme are also members of college teaching staff and where Certificate in Education tutors also have a college quality assurance role in relation to observed teaching.

### 8.1 Conceptions of 'outstanding' and how these compare with Ofsted grading criteria

The case studies produced by Consortium managers generated a long list of features associated with outstanding trainees (Appendix 2) and represented a summary of the views of this 'community of practice'. The identified features roughly divided into two sections - those related to the trainee as teacher and the trainee as learner, although there was some overlap between the two, for example, when referring to high level subject specialist knowledge or where the trainee made links between the course and their practice and '*constantly applied learning from course to teaching*'.

The characteristics associated with outstanding teaching included overarching features such as '*learner empowerment*', '*commitment to equality and diversity*' and '*high level of commitment and innovation*'; relational features such as '*excellent relationship with learners, they are enthusiastic, enjoy creativity*'; pedagogical features such as '*student-centred teaching*'; adapting '*flexibly to learner*'; teaching approaches such as '*makes learning lively by*

*relevant projects topical and relevant to learners' age and interests*'; There were also a number of references to teacher expectations *'ambition for learners'*, manifested through *'compassionate and challenging delivery'*. High quality planning, excellent resources, differentiation and inclusion, literacy and numeracy, record keeping and assessment. It is unlikely that any experienced teacher would quarrel with these features and, indeed, they correspond broadly to Hattie's meta-analysis (2009) which drew conclusions about 'expert' teaching. This correspondence indicates the problem with the notion of 'potential' in relation to 'outstanding' performance, in that at some point outstanding 'potential' needs to be translated into outstanding 'practice' in order for it to continue to be judged 'outstanding'.

The list in Appendix 2 indicates the features of outstanding trainees, but these views are a composite of the Consortium 'community', and are subject to the interpretation and prioritisation of individual tutors. Interviews with observing tutors on the in-service Certificate in Education/PGCE confirmed the Consortium 'community's' views of 'outstanding' and some features, including enthusiasm and ability to inspire, engagement with learners and flexibility to adapt to different circumstances were mentioned by all.

As might be expected, different observing tutors placed more emphasis on some features than others. For some tutors excellent planning was an important feature of 'outstanding teaching'; other tutors placed little or no emphasis on this in their responses during the research interviews. Bias in this case can be corrected by the standard observation proforma where all tutors need to comment on the trainee's capacity to plan. This provides an example of where course documentation can help develop some consistency in practice. However, where 'planning' was emphasised, it related to lesson planning, whereas Ofsted places an equal emphasis on 'planning for progression'. Further consideration of the Ofsted criteria may involve some changes in course documentation as a result.

Observing tutors' comments 'put flesh' on the list of features generated by the Consortium community, showing how they played out in real-life practice. Examples of this are the illustration of 'flexibility' (Section 5.3.2) and of the teaching which brought to life the ability to 'enthuse' (5.3.3). Continued opportunities for Consortium tutors to discuss and illustrate their understandings of 'outstanding' teaching from real and recent examples would keep these ideas alive and open to change, rather than fossilised and distant from practice. This would also help Consortium tutors clarify expectations in terms of the highest aspirations for their trainees.

The Consortium tutors' ideas of an 'outstanding' learner brought in a number of features related to high quality course work, together with the ability and willingness to reflect and engage with ideas and theory. These features were related to the learner as a student on a University course with academic as well as professional requirements. However, wider

attributes of being a learner were also present, in particular the 'willingness' to learn, being '*diligent*' and '*enthusiastic*' '*attends all sessions*' – these features not only indicated a good 'student' but also signaled a wider commitment to development through learning.

'Outstanding' trainees were identified as eager to learn and used the more theoretical parts of the course, as well as input from observations of teaching to move their learning forward in relation to their practice. Observing tutors placed a great deal of emphasis on the trainee's ability to listen and learn from tutor feedback and it was clear that for these tutors 'outstanding' teaching also included an '*outstanding ability to learn and develop teaching*'.

In the case studies of 'weak' trainees more emphasis was placed on the trainee as learner on the ITE course than as a teacher, with a focus on lack of academic skills and poor motivation. Here a lack of academic skills could act as a barrier preventing the trainee from focusing on learning to teach. Although there were some contextual factors involved, including unstable work contexts and lack of teaching hours, a lack of motivation could signal a lack of interest in learning - the 'bread and butter' of the teaching profession. Interestingly the data revealed that there was a bias towards selecting male trainees as exemplars of 'weak' trainees. There are a number of possible reasons why this might be the case, including a greater number of males from craft backgrounds with few previous academic qualifications. This is an area which needs more consideration by the Consortium.

In many ways, ideas from the Consortium tutors about 'outstanding' trainees corresponded closely to the Ofsted grading criteria. For example, in the key aspects of 'outstanding' performance in lessons (Ofsted, 2009), Ofsted identify the ability to 'teach lessons that invariably capture the interest of learners' and expect 'outstanding' teachers to 'have a rapport with learners' which includes 'high quality dialogue and questioning'. They also mention flexibility and the ability to respond quickly to learners' responses. These were all areas identified by the observing tutors. However, there were areas where there were some differences from the Ofsted criteria. Ofsted expects that the trainee will teach students to explain how the teaching has helped them progress. This was not included in tutors' discussions of 'outstanding' teaching, although it is unclear what Ofsted intends here. It could indicate the teacher's role in developing active learners who are aware of how they learn, or it could indicate using the students' views for evaluation purposes.

Considering the Ofsted criteria for all four aspects of trainee performance, Consortium tutors' suggestions covered the majority of these aspects, although there were some gaps. Tutors' responses made very little reference to targets, including feedback and target setting. There was no mention of 'Every Child Matters (ECM)', and although many of the values underpinning ECM were implicit in many tutors' comments, this omission is surprising, given its current importance in Ofsted inspections. Another feature which did not appear in any tutors' ideas of 'outstanding' was a trainee's capacity to carry out summative assessments.

There was no mention of this by observing tutors, nor any explicit mention in the Consortium tutors' list, although types of developmental assessment, including initial and formative assessment were identified. This is worthy of further consideration, given the emphasis on 'measurement of achievement' and 'retention and achievement' in Ofsted inspections and the high value placed on trainee 'development' within the Consortium community of practice.

## **8.2 The effect of teaching context on 'outstanding' performance**

A major issue to be considered in this research was whether notions of 'outstanding' varied according to teaching context. Although some stated that they would base their judgements on the same aspects of teaching no matter what the context, most tutors thought that the teaching context did have an effect. This bears out recent research on the effect of learning cultures on teaching and learning (James and Biesta, 2007). The nature of the context where a trainee taught could affect the teaching approaches that were valued, the favoured methods of delivery and the kinds of resources that were considered appropriate in that context. Tutors suggested that different contexts had particular characteristics which demanded very different types of skills from teachers. For example tutors suggested that the community context often required a strong awareness of professional boundaries and traditionally valued a 'nurturing' and 'supportive' relationship with learners. In this context, trainees working with more vulnerable learners would not be expected to prioritise challenge as a teaching mode. This was in contrast to trainees teaching HE in FE, where challenge and criticality were highly valued as teaching strengths. The different expectations of tutors carrying out observations were explored through a comparison of comments on trainees teaching HE in FE compared with trainees teaching solely FE.

A learning culture of HE in FE is currently developing, with the aim of creating a clear distinction between 'HE' culture and the rest of an FE college. In this context, less detailed session plans, broader learning outcomes and tutor-centred methods such as lectures being used as 'symbolic markers' (Jones, 2006) of an HE ethos. Trainees teaching HE in FE are not necessarily encouraged within their work environment to use many and varied teaching strategies, and produce detailed session plans linked to measurable objectives that are valued in FE teaching. The issue for the observing tutor is whether an HE in FE trainee can still be judged 'outstanding' when they omit much of what is required by an FE tutor. In other words, does the observing tutor allow the culture of the context to determine what is an 'outstanding' session?

Tutors carrying out observations and interviewed for this research introduced a combination of factors in their judgements on this. There were certain characteristics of 'outstanding' teaching which were expected wherever they observed – enthusiasm for, and knowledge of the subject, the ability to inspire and motivate students and excellent relational skills. However tutors showed considerable sensitivity to the demands of context and discussed the features

of HE teaching that would be expected when considering outstanding teaching in that context. These included meeting the higher expectations of students who have paid to come on a higher level course, a deeper level of subject knowledge, challenge, criticality and critical evaluation. Although this list might imply that HE teaching is what is done in other contexts, only more so, it was underpinned by a notion of HE which contextualised those features so that they become qualitatively different. As one tutor expressed it: HE is more about *'people's attitudes, people's reflection, things which can't easily be measured'*.

As tutors' understandings of the needs of different contexts is an important aspect of their judgements of a trainee's performance, it would be useful to extend this research into investigating in more detail how the cultures and practices of different contexts in the LSS impact on tutors' judgements in teaching observations. This would include the constraints on demonstrating 'outstanding' teaching for trainees working in certain LSS contexts.

### **8.3. Issues related to grading of observations**

Many issues emerged related to the effect of Ofsted grading on tutor observations of trainees. Different perceptions of the purposes of observation, trainee and tutor identities, processes of tutor feedback were interlinked themes emerging from the data.

Views on grading depended on perceptions of the purposes of observation. The data indicated four different purposes for observation. These were: developing teachers' skills and knowledge, assuring standards of teaching, informing college QA systems and preparing for Ofsted inspection. The first purpose was strongly supported by observing tutors interviewed for the research, who saw observations for the Certificate in Education/PGCE as mainly developmental, formative assessment. HR managers agreed with this view, but also described that they were 'trusting the tutors are clear about the standard'. This links to the other purposes of observation - more concerned with observation as summative assessment within the FE college or other LSS environments, where judgements on the standards of teaching were explicit.

Tutors carrying out observations for the Certificate in Education/PGCE reflected their views of the process as developmental through their use of supportive and motivational feedback focusing on evidence of what had been done well and coaching the trainee to improve. A dialogic approach was used for feedback with some encouragement for the trainee to self evaluate. Tutor feedback comments tended to avoid overt judgements on trainee performance and focussed on the development role rather than a role related to assurance of teaching standards. This was reflected in the sometimes ambiguous use of evaluative terms, which could be understood in different ways by the trainee and by the use of quite neutral terms such as 'clear' or 'interesting' which, although evaluative in the sense that they reflected the tutor's opinion, avoided summative connotations. Interestingly, most tutors felt that

trainees would not be clear about the standard of their teaching as a result of the tutor feedback. This is an area which needs further investigation to ensure that both trainee and tutor communicate effectively about the standard of teaching observed. Here it is also important for tutor and trainee to agree on what the highest standards of teaching 'look like' in a trainee's teaching context, so that trainees have a tangible set of aspirations to focus their development.

Grading indicates an unequivocal summative judgement and the research indicated that tutors' resistance to grading derived from a view that grading would undermine the developmental nature of observations. This was not the case with all the tutors, and one tutor actually asked the trainee to grade themselves and then confirmed the grade with them. Some tutors indicated that trainees would find grading helpful, as it would give them a clear indication of the criteria against which they were being observed. Recent research for the Consortium discovered that approximately a third of trainees would like to be graded (Burrows, 2008). The Consortium should consider ways of using summative assessments of trainees' teaching at a small number of monitoring points throughout the duration of the course. A decision will need to be made as to whether some form of grading is to be used in this process with the implication that tutors and trainees would need to be clear that trainees could fail to meet the required standards at these monitoring points. Trainees would also need to be engaged in explicit dialogue on the standards of their teaching throughout the course.

#### **8.4 Trainee and tutor identities**

The data revealed both tutors and trainees manifested different identities at different times and the nature of these identities gave an insight into tensions that operated between the different stakeholders in the observation process.

Tutors described trainees in terms of three identities: learner on the Certificate in Education programme, trainee teacher learning to improve their teaching and college employee, teaching on college courses. In the identities of trainee teacher and college employee, observations served different purposes – development in the ITE course and assurance of standards as college employee. If trainees were teaching on both FE and HE in FE courses, one could argue their college identities were also conflicted, with each type of provision embedded in a different ethos and culture.

Observing tutors also described themselves in terms of different identities. Most tutors revealed strong 'teacher' identities, focusing on the trainee as trainee teacher, looking for signs that the trainee had 'learned' from previous observations. The observing tutor used a range of teaching strategies, including coaching, discussion, questioning and tutor input, to help the trainee learn from the observation process. Tutors also showed how they used a constructivist approach in the feedback process, enabling the trainee to construct new

knowledge about teaching and their own practice. This teaching identity was much stronger than that of 'assessor', making judgements on standards of performance.

All tutors were also FE college staff and hence were operating in two 'learning sites' – that of the Certificate in Education/PGCE programme - HE in FE - and that of the rest of their work in the college. Here there were potential tensions in their identities as ITE tutor and FE college tutor. Some tutors were also involved in college observations for QA purposes, where their assessment function was more prominent. These tutors described pressures from management if trainees were given low grades as members of college staff. They also described pressures from trainees who were being inspected for college purposes and who wanted an indication of the grade they might receive. Here tutors felt they had to be careful not to signal an Ofsted college inspection grade by the use of any evaluative terms used in Ofsted grading criteria. This led to a situation where some tutors were worried about using 'good' in their feedback in case the trainee seizes on it as an indication of a 'grade 2'. The conflicting pressures of ITE tutor and College QA observer may have contributed to an apparent reluctance to comment explicitly on the standard of teaching observed.

The issue of conflicting tutor roles is not confined to the observing tutors interviewed, but, for example, almost fifty percent of Consortium centre managers are also involved in college grading for QA purposes. Although HR managers did indicate that they saw the Certificate in Education/PGCE as developmental, their comment about putting a 'trust' in tutors to be clear about standards, together with the comment that college students expect the same quality of teaching from trainees and college staff, suggests that the issue of grading cannot be ignored by the Consortium. A number of options could be explored. These could include creating a stronger demarcation of the Certificate in Education/PGCE observations as developmental; using a combination of developmental formative observations and judgemental summative observations, perhaps located at two key points in the course – the middle and end, for example; adopting the Ofsted grading system used by colleges on the basis that this could result in less conflict for the trainee and college tutors. In all of these processes, Consortium tutors who have experience of grading could be invited to give more information about the ideas and processes involved in their own colleges – as college practices vary in this respect. However, a discussion about grading enables Consortium tutors to discuss and review the values and beliefs about ITE that underpin their work, whilst acknowledging the demands of different stakeholders in the observation process.

## 9 Recommendations

It is evident that the issues identified in this report, arising as a result of the Ofsted criteria for ITE inspection for the LSS, will have implications for HEI ITE partnerships offering Certificate in Education/PGCE programmes. The following are recommendations for the Huddersfield Consortium arising from the research:

### 9.1 Opportunities should be created for Consortium tutors to discuss and illustrate their understandings of 'outstanding' teaching from real and recent examples.

The research has shown that notions of 'outstanding' are complex and, to some extent, contingent on context. Consistency of judgements cannot be achieved by 'one-off' standardising events, but need to be developed through an ongoing process of discussion and illustration by members at network meetings, through the use of exemplars and at moderation meetings. This would keep these ideas alive and open to change, rather than fossilised and distant from practice. ITE tutors who also have a college QA role in observations should have opportunities to inform this discussion from a college perspective. Consideration should be given to how mentors will also be involved in this process.

**9.2 The Consortium should consider ways of using summative assessments of trainees' teaching at a small number of monitoring points throughout the duration of the course.** A decision will need to be made as to whether explicit grading criteria are to be used in the observation of teaching or, more broadly, on each trainee's overall performance on the course. Whatever is decided, the research has indicated the importance of both tutors and trainees being clear about expected standards of teaching, including the possibility that a trainee could fail to meet these standards. Summative assessments of trainee performance at, for example, two monitoring points throughout the course, could have the aim of ensuring that tutors and trainees have a shared understanding of the standard the trainee has achieved at that point, whilst keeping the main focus of observations as developmental and formative.

### 9.3 Documentation and processes should be considered which encourage tutor/trainee dialogue and trainee self-assessment on standards of teaching.

These should acknowledge the importance of the tutor's 'teaching' role in developmental observations. It is important for tutor and trainee to agree on what the highest standards of teaching 'look like' in a trainee's teaching context, so that trainees have a tangible set of aspirations to focus their development. This would also provide a means for trainees to explore potential differences in expectation between ITE tutors and college observations for quality assurance purposes. More opportunities should be established for trainees to learn through dialogue with tutor and peers, as well as their own self assessment, about the standards of their teaching. Practices from other ITE providers should be used to inform how this process might be facilitated (for example Taylor, 2009). Further research on the content

and language of tutor feedback and trainees' understanding of feedback following observed teaching could help here in clarifying how expectations of standards of teaching are communicated and understood.

**9.4 Further research should be undertaken into different contexts in the LSS and how these impact on tutors' judgements in teaching observations.** This research report has highlighted how tutors take into account features associated with the HE in FE context when observing trainees teaching HE in FE. Given the wide range of LSS contexts associated with the Huddersfield Consortium, it would be useful to conduct more detailed research on the impact of different LSS teaching contexts on tutors' judgements and trainees' capacity to demonstrate 'outstanding' teaching.

**9.5 Establish whether there is any foundation for concern in terms of male trainees' performance on the Certificate in Education/PGCE.** The research highlighted a disproportionate number of male trainees selected as exemplars of 'weak' trainees. This may or may not be significant due to the small numbers involved, but further investigation should take place to explore the reasons behind this possible bias.

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## 11 Appendices

### Appendix 1: Interview Schedule

#### Huddersfield Consortium Project

#### The grading of teaching observations: implications for teacher educators in Higher Education partnerships

#### Interview questions for detailed semi-structured interviews with tutors following observation and feedback to trainee

##### Questions on the observed teaching

1. What were you particularly looking for/at during the session that you observed?

##### *Grading*

2. If you had to grade this teaching session, what grade would you award?  
Outstanding, good, satisfactory, inadequate (*Ofsted criteria, 2008*)
3. What do you base your decision on?
4. *If outstanding:* What is it that makes this session outstanding?
5. *If NOT outstanding:* What would the trainee have to do to achieve a grade of  
outstanding?
6. In your thinking about grading, do you differentiate between a **lesson** that is  
outstanding and a **teacher** that is outstanding? Yes/No?
7. *If 'yes',* How?
8. What would indicate to you that an individual had the **potential** to be an outstanding  
teacher?

##### Questions on the feedback on observation of teaching

9. What do you usually do when you give feedback to trainees on their teaching?
10. How do you think the **trainee** knows whether you think the lesson was outstanding,  
good, satisfactory or inadequate?

##### Questions on the teaching context

11. Apart from HE in FE, can you give me some examples of different contexts and  
courses you observe?
12. Do you expect teaching to have particular characteristics in different contexts?
13. Does your college have a separate HE centre?
14. *If yes,* Are there any aspects/practices of the HE centre which are different to the  
main FE college?

15. Do you think there are aspects or characteristics of teaching a session of HE in FE that are different to teaching in other FE or Lifelong Learning sector contexts (i.e. that are specific to an HE in FE context)?
16. *If yes*, How would teaching HE in FE compare to the characteristics you would expect of someone teaching in other contexts where you carry out observations?
17. How far do you think the teaching context affects how you judge the session?

### **Questions about the context in which the observing tutor is working**

18. Do you carry out observations of teaching outside of the PGCE/Cert Ed programme?  
*If yes*: Which course(s)?
19. Are you involved with the system of observation used by your institution (as an observer and/or as someone who is observed)? *If yes*: How?
20. *If yes*: Is teaching graded in other systems you work with?
21. *If yes*: What grading is used, where does it come from? Is it the same as the Ofsted grading? If not, how does it compare?
22. *If yes*, Have you had any training on grading? If so, who has given it?
23. Ofsted uses the term 'outstanding'. Do you think you would make the same decision on a trainee if you were asked to grade them 'excellent'?
24. Would you grade more trainees 'excellent' than 'outstanding'?
25. Something about you personally – can you call to mind someone you have met who you would call an outstanding teacher? What made them outstanding?
26. Any other comments about anything raised in this interview?

**Appendix 2: Characteristics of Outstanding Trainees: compiled from  
consortium tutors' case studies**

<b>Characteristics of an outstanding teacher</b>	<b>Characteristics of an outstanding learner</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Variety in learning and assessment</li> <li>• Creative use of ICT</li> <li>• <u>Excellent</u> resources</li> <li>• Careful management of learners</li> <li>• Learner engagement</li> <li>• High expectations of learners</li> <li>• Good planning and preparation - attention to detail</li> <li>• Good communication</li> <li>• Adapts flexibly to learner</li> <li>• Commitment to equality and diversity</li> <li>• Integrity - not 'tick box'</li> <li>• Makes learning accessible, meaningful and fun</li> <li>• High level of commitment and innovation</li> <li>• Constantly applied learning from course to teaching</li> <li>• Good resource design</li> <li>• Learner empowerment</li> <li>• TPs - deep analysis</li> <li>• Relationship with learner and employer needs</li> <li>• Pursuit of excellence</li> <li>• Detailed lesson preparation</li> <li>• Up to date with subject specialism and issues</li> <li>• Wide variety of delivery approaches</li> <li>• Uses ICT where appropriate - but backup</li> <li>• Good at identifying and supporting individual needs</li> <li>• Honest and supportive feedback</li> <li>• Reflects on delivery - strives for improvement</li> <li>• Student-centred teaching, challenges learners and ensures achieve learning outcomes</li> <li>• Practical teaching good from beginning</li> <li>• Differentiated tasks</li> <li>• Involves learners</li> <li>• Wide variety of teaching strategies</li> <li>• Uses range of different assessment methods</li> <li>• Always trying new ideas, technology, strategies</li> <li>• Constant improvement throughout Cert Ed</li> <li>• Incorporating suggestions into future practice</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Attends all sessions</li> <li>• Progressed throughout PGCE</li> <li>• Embraced principles of T&amp;L</li> <li>• Active learner/team player</li> <li>• Motivated and open to new ideas</li> <li>• Eager to learn and experiment</li> <li>• Reflects creatively</li> <li>• Keeps up to date</li> <li>• Diligent, enthusiastic – performs above expectations in module</li> <li>• Showing evidence of embedding reflective practice and some basis theoretical approaches in written work</li> <li>• Attended all taught sessions</li> <li>• Actively seeking out learning</li> <li>• Accepted tutor feedback</li> <li>• Own written work linked theory and practice, wide reading, contributed in class</li> <li>• Supports and motivates other trainees, helps them to engage with learning theory</li> <li>• High standard of course work 'demonstrates her dedication to professional development'</li> <li>• Had studied PTLLS with same tutors</li> <li>• Commitment to coursework</li> <li>• Very interested, motivated, enthusiastic</li> <li>• Work is very good, academically well referenced. '.. writes the assignments early and takes on board any feedback good-humouredly and diligently. .. loves the course.'</li> <li>• Excellent written work since start of course – high standard of reflection (transferred from nurse training use of reflection)</li> <li>• Strong commitment to good practice</li> <li>• Excellent subject knowledge and literacy skills</li> <li>• Willingness to be innovative</li> <li>• ICT as a tool</li> <li>• Responds and adapts to learning situations 'so that learning is enhanced'</li> <li>• Started with lack of confidence in own ability</li> <li>• Hard work and acted on advice given</li> </ul>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Good planning</li> <li>• 'Ability to interact with learners to encourage and support individual and group learning'</li> <li>• Teaching incorporated differentiation, literacy, language and numeracy</li> <li>• Good practice in differentiation and challenge for students</li> <li>• Skilled in integrating key skills</li> <li>• Good initial assessment of students</li> <li>• Culturally sensitive (attention to equality and diversity)</li> <li>• In her studies, clear notions of what needs to be done to improve</li> <li>• Reflects well</li> <li>• Models best practice in teaching – using variety of methods to suit learning styles, constantly checks understanding</li> <li>• Ambition for learners</li> <li>• Engages learner and ensures all learners are challenged</li> <li>• Reflects well</li> <li>• Teaches IT to students with complex needs</li> <li>• Makes sure all can succeed</li> <li>• Sensitive, patient, aware of physical, emotional and intellectual requirements of everyone</li> <li>• Make learning lively by relevant projects topical and relevant to learners' age and interests</li> <li>• Cultural diversity reflected in activities and materials</li> <li>• Excellent relationship with learners, they are enthusiastic, enjoy creativity</li> <li>• Work will be displayed</li> <li>• Teaching and learning strategies promote high expectations of learners</li> <li>• Maintains initial assessment and monitoring records of learners' progress</li> <li>• Good facilitation skills</li> <li>• High quality classroom docs.</li> <li>• Enthusiastic about inclusive practice and differentiation</li> <li>• Uses ILT and VLE</li> <li>• Innovative class material design and use</li> <li>• Delivers high quality lessons</li> <li>• High standard of supporting paperwork – lesson plans, ILPs, assessment reports, teaching materials</li> <li>• Compassionate and challenging delivery</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Imaginative ways of embedding literacy and numeracy</li> <li>• Engages in theory, well-written assignments</li> <li>• Excellent subject specialist knowledge and vocational experience</li> <li>• Good progress on course</li> <li>• Excellent attendance</li> <li>• Participation in class</li> <li>• Open to new ideas</li> <li>• Intellectual capacity to evaluate theoretical concepts and write assignments to high academic standard</li> <li>• Engagement with all aspects of course</li> <li>• Active in seeking for peer feedback</li> <li>• Applies different theories in practice, practice-based evidence, discusses with mentor</li> <li>• Embraced all aspects of Cert Ed and 'more importantly' applied this to own teaching</li> <li>• Uses feedback from observations, learners and background study/research to improve teaching</li> </ul>
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<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Commitment to excellence in planning</li><li>• Confident teacher – very well planned lessons</li><li>• Wide range of teaching in different contexts</li><li>• Variety of teaching and learning methods, good pace</li><li>• Very good classroom management.</li><li>• Supports and challenges learners, sensitive to E&amp;D</li><li>• Demonstrates inclusive practice.</li><li>• Enthuses learners – personality and belief in what teaching</li><li>• Inspires and challenges, but achievable targets</li><li>• Effective embedding of ICT.</li><li>• Good range of learning activities, addresses different learning styles</li><li>• Good formative assessment, clear feedback.</li><li>• Relevant course context. Pace, 'deep learning'</li><li>• Links between theory and practice</li><li>• Draws on own occupational experience</li><li>• Prepares excellent sessions for learners –addresses all learning styles and uses assessment imaginatively</li></ul>	
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