Concerns with Ofsted inspections of ITT - justified or just “grumpy old teacher educators”? 

This item was submitted to Loughborough University's Institutional Repository by the/an author.

Citation: CALE, L. and HARRIS, J., 2008. Concerns with Ofsted inspections of ITT - justified or just “grumpy old teacher educators”? British Educational Research Association Annual Conference, Heriot-Watt University, Edinburgh, 3-6 September 2008

Additional Information:

- This is a conference paper, presented at the British Educational Research Association Annual Conference, Heriot-Watt University, Edinburgh, 3-6 September 2008. Also available at http://www.leeds.ac.uk/bei/COLN/COLN_default.html

Metadata Record: https://dspace.lboro.ac.uk/2134/4570

Version: Not specified

Please cite the published version.
This item was submitted to Loughborough’s Institutional Repository (https://dspace.lboro.ac.uk/) by the author and is made available under the following Creative Commons Licence conditions.

![Creative Commons Licence](https://i.imgur.com/353x727.png)

**Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivs 2.5**

You are free:

- to copy, distribute, display, and perform the work

Under the following conditions:

- **Attribution**: You must attribute the work in the manner specified by the author or licensor.
- **Noncommercial**: You may not use this work for commercial purposes.
- **No Derivative Works**: You may not alter, transform, or build upon this work.

For any reuse or distribution, you must make clear to others the license terms of this work. Any of these conditions can be waived if you get permission from the copyright holder.

Your fair use and other rights are in no way affected by the above.

This is a human-readable summary of the [Legal Code](http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/2.5/).

For the full text of this licence, please go to:

[http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/2.5/](http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/2.5/)
Concerns with Ofsted inspections of ITT – Justified or just ‘grumpy old teacher educators’?

Dr Lorraine Cale and Dr Jo Harris
Loughborough University
E-mail: l.a.cale@lboro.ac.uk; j.p.harris@lboro.ac.uk

Introduction
The Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted) inspects the quality of all Initial Teacher Training (ITT) provision in England on behalf of the Training and Development Agency for Schools (TDA). According to Ofsted, the main purposes of the inspection of ITT are to: ensure public accountability for the quality of ITT; stimulate improvement in the quality of provision; provide objective judgements on providers for public information; inform policy; enable the statutory link to be made between funding and quality; and check compliance with statutory requirements (Ofsted, 2005a, p. 1). Since the introduction of ITT inspection in 1995 however, generally the response to inspection from teacher educators has been negative (Graham, 1997; Sutherland, 1997) and a number of concerns and issues have been raised over the inspection process and/or the frameworks adopted (see for example, Cale & Harris, 2003; Campbell & Husbands 2000; Hardy & Evans, 2000; Jones & Sinkinson, 2000; Sinkinson & Jones, 2001; Tymms, 1997; Williams, 1997).

The secondary ITT course at Loughborough University is a one year Post Graduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) course which trains approximately 130 teachers a year in three subjects, Design & Technology, Physical Education and Science. Since 1996/97, we have undergone four Ofsted inspections of our secondary provision, detailed accounts of some of which are documented elsewhere (see Hardy & Evans, 2000; Cale & Harris, 2003; Cale & Harris, in press). Following the first inspection of our secondary Physical Education Course in 1996/97, and ‘fired by dismay and frustration for the practices’ Ofsted and the TTA (now TDA) demonstrated at the time, our colleagues Hardy & Evans (2000, p.58) expressed grave concerns about, and highlighted a number of faults and limitations in the system. Over ten years on, and based primarily on the experiences and reflections of our last inspection in 2005/06, this paper provides a further critical account of ITT inspection and aims to highlight some of the on-going concerns we have. Whilst most relate to inspection generally and will be issues faced by all providers, others are specific to our own Ofsted experiences.

Although this is a critique, we wish to make it clear that we are not anti-inspection, nor do we wish to appear merely ‘grumpy old teacher educators’ intent on bemoaning a system for no good reason. To the contrary, we accept the importance of accountability and strive for continuous improvement in our course. We have also been very pleased with the outcomes, albeit not with the implications of, our last three inspections, a point which we revisit later. Since 1999/2000, we have achieved a grade 1, denoting ‘outstanding’, for ‘Quality of Training’ or ‘Management and Quality Assurance’ of our course, as applicable, and following a successful Ofsted grade review recently, we have been awarded grade 1 for all aspects of our training, future details of which are also provided later. Furthermore,
and as we have noted previously (Cale & Harris, 2003; Cale & Harris, in press), the points raised, whilst at times critical of the inspectorate and the inspection process, are not intended as a reflection of the quality of individual inspectors. Rather, we hope that fellow professionals can relate to and/or sympathise with our concerns and concur that our ‘grumpiness’ is justified.

**High Stakes**

Understandably a major concern with ITT inspection and one which has been widely acknowledged is the ‘high stakes’ involved (Cale & Harris, 2003; Campbell & Husbands 2000; Furlong et al., 2000; Jones & Sinkinson, 2000; Sinkinson, 2004; Sinkinson & Jones, 2001; Tymms, 1997; Williams, 1997). Ofsted inspection results are published and are highly significant because the TDA has a statutory duty to take account of the outcomes when funding ITT provision. The evidence gathered from inspections is converted to grades and is used to inform the allocation of trainee numbers and funding to ITT providers, and accreditation decisions. Following inspection, the TDA use the Ofsted data to produce ‘quality categories’ on an A-E scale (where A is the highest category), which are published as ‘league tables’. Further, if any aspect of provision is judged to be non compliant (grade E), accreditation of all the ITT courses an institution provides may be withdrawn (Sinkinson, 2004). Thus, there is a close and crucial link between the outcome of the inspection of any course and the viability and reputation of the ITT provider (Sinkinson, 2004), with institutions standing to make significant gains or losses consequent upon the outcome (Williams, 1997). Sinkinson & Jones (2001) note how issues concerning funding allocations, trainee numbers and institutional reputations, not to mention lecturers’ jobs, are a direct consequence of the outcomes of inspections and Jones & Sinkinson (2000, p.81) warn how a poor Ofsted rating can lead to ‘…course closure, while even satisfactory ratings can lead to uncertainty over course quota, leading to a spiral of decline in course viability’. In 2003, we noted how the penalty for the ‘mediocre’ set of grades following our first inspection of the secondary Physical Education (PE) course in 1996/97 was a ‘dented’ reputation and a 10% reduction in trainee numbers with an associated loss of funding, not to mention reduced morale (Cale & Harris, 2003).

With regards to the above, due to achieving a grade 1 for Management and Quality Assurance previously, Loughborough was assigned ‘category B priority’ status. Under the formula that was applied, and in line with other category B priority providers and cuts nationally, just prior to our last inspection we received news from the TDA that our ITT allocation was to be reduced by 11% across 3 years. However, we were particularly concerned to learn that the reduction was to be in one subject only, Physical Education (because the other two subjects offered at Loughborough are both shortage subjects and were therefore protected), and that it was to lose a total of 21 places between 2006-2008. In percentage terms, this represented a 26.3% decrease in numbers and the greatest cut faced by any PE ITT provider in England, irrespective of Ofsted category rating. Such cuts have had serious financial implications and continue to pose a threat to the sustainable future of ITT at Loughborough. Thus, far from ‘satisfactory’ ratings leading to uncertainties over quotas and the viability of courses (Jones & Sinkinson, 2000), ‘good’ ratings have also led to the same uncertainties.
The validity, reliability and credibility of inspections

Given the high stakes involved, Sinkinson & Jones (2001) argue it is vitally important that all involved have confidence in the inspection methodology and the judgments made, which brings us onto a second major concern associated with ITT inspection. A number of authors have expressed concerns over the reliability, validity and credibility of inspections and/or the methodology involved (Campbell & Husbands, 2000; Cale & Harris, 2003; Graham & Nabb, 1999; Jones & Sinkinson, 2000; Hardy & Evans, 2000; Sinkinson & Jones, 2001; Sinkinson, 2004; 2005; Tymms, 1997; Williams, 1997). Following a survey of all HEI partnership providers of ITT courses, Graham & Nabb (1999) reported that fewer than 10% of 152 providers were confident that the inspection of courses was a valid, reliable and consistent process. On the basis of analyses of published Ofsted inspection reports for secondary courses (Jones & Sinkinson, 2000; Sinkinson & Jones, 2001; Sinkinson, 2005), a number of variations and inconsistencies in reports have been highlighted, leading Sinkinson & Jones (2001) to conclude that there is ‘much room for development in order that all participants in the process …are confident that it is reliable, valid and robust’ (p.235). Similarly, in 2004, Sinkinson focused on the role of the Managing Inspector in effecting consistency of judgement and reporting in reports of four HEI-based providers. Revealing several important inconsistencies of reporting in the data and examples given, she questioned how confident providers should be about the consistency of judgements made through inspection. On this issue, and based on evidence drawn from inspections of ITT between 1996-1998 at the University of Warwick, Campbell & Husbands (2000) argued that the inspection methodology and the application of published criteria were insufficiently reliable to bear the weight of the consequences of the outcomes. Tymms (1997) meanwhile, adopted a simulation approach to estimate the likelihood of an institution being identified as non compliant. From his analysis he concluded that ‘very satisfactory institutions have a high chance of failing an inspection’ (p.1). With regards to our own institution, Hardy & Evans’ (2000) analysis of the practices Ofsted and the TTA demonstrated in 1996/97 drew attention to the systemic faults inherent in the inspection system which they claimed needed to be addressed for it to have validity and credibility.

More recently, and following further successful inspections, we have still reported many limitations of ITT inspection and have questioned the credibility of the process (Cale & Harris, 2003, Cale & Harris, in press).

Since the introduction of ITT inspections, providers have been subjected to four different frameworks (Ofsted, 1996; 1998; 2002; 2005a) and another new framework is to be introduced from September 2008 for 2008-2011 (Ofsted, 2008). According to Ofsted, subsequent changes to the inspection arrangements have aimed to reduce the inspection burden for providers and be more efficient and cost effective for both providers and Ofsted. It is furthermore claimed that for the 2008-2011 inspection cycle, a single framework will be adopted and that inspections will be proportionate to risk and tailored to the context and needs of each provider (Ofsted, 2008). Our most recent inspection however, as was the preceding one, was under the 2005 framework which was differentiated and comprised full and short inspections (Ofsted, 2005a). According to the quality of provision, an institution received either a full or short inspection. Category A and category B providers received a short inspection whereas category C providers received a full inspection. Under the 2005
framework, the focus of short inspections was on Management and Quality Assurance (M&QA) across an institution’s ITT provision as a whole, the main purpose of which was to check that, overall, at least good quality training provision had been maintained (Ofsted, 2005b). Full inspections also covered the M&QA of the whole provision, as well as the quality of the training programme and the standards of trainees’ teaching. As a category B priority provider at the time, our previous two inspections were both short.

A major concern and source of frustration with this arrangement however, was that, under the framework, providers were unable to improve their category status following a short inspection. It only permitted confirmation of a previous grade. Furthermore, if the outcome of an inspection was positive and a good provider was again judged to be good or very good, they were not eligible to receive a full inspection. Thus, a provider like ourselves was destined to be forever no more than ‘good’. Improving our category status was not only important to us professionally, but it was critical to us financially - the only providers protected from the TDA’s allocation cuts were, and are likely to continue to be, category A providers. Thus, as mentioned earlier, we had been penalized heavily under this system with a 26.3% reduction in Physical Education numbers.

Following our previous inspection, we quizzed the Managing Inspector over this anomaly within the framework and how such a significant reduction in numbers could be justified on the basis of successive successful inspections. The Inspector replied that these were interesting questions which should be pursued. We took his advice which led to lengthy and time consuming communication between ourselves, Ofsted and the TDA whereby we highlighted the flaws in the system and urged them to find a solution to the problem. The eventual result was that, following consultation, Ofsted developed a procedure to allow providers with a grade 1 for M&QA to be considered for re-categorisation from category B to category A by the TDA. In November 2007, providers who felt they had robust evidence to demonstrate improvements in training and standards were invited to submit a request to Ofsted to support their case for a grade review in the form of a detailed self evaluation document. Despite the tight deadlines that were imposed for this, we did not hesitate in taking Ofsted up on their invitation. The self evaluation document and supporting evidence was submitted for scrutiny in February 2008 and in the April we received news that our request for re-categorisation had been successful and that we had been awarded grade 1 in all aspects of provision.

Whilst we welcomed the opportunity and the outcome of the grade review, unfortunately it came rather too late in that, as explained, we had already been subjected to significant quota cuts. It will however, better protect us from cuts in the future. The fact that such a situation ever arose in the first place though, surely raises serious questions over the credibility of ITT inspection. Earlier, it was noted how one of the purposes of inspection was to ‘stimulate improvement in the quality of provision’ (Ofsted, 2005a, p.1). In our view, a system which repeatedly failed to recognize or reward improvement, or which it could be argued in our case punished it, is fundamentally flawed and can do little to ‘stimulate improvement’. To the contrary, such a system has made us feel deeply frustrated and very grumpy!
For various reasons, others (Campbell & Husbands, 2000; Graham & Nabb, 1999; Sinkinson & Jones, 2001) similarly hold the view that, contrary to the intended purposes of inspection, the process contributes little to improvement and quality enhancement in ITT. Sinkinson & Jones (2001) for example, note how there appears to be little confidence amongst providers that the feedback given by Ofsted contributes to the development of practice. Similarly, Campbell & Husbands (2000) argue that an inspection regime designed to ensure compliance, and in which criteria are imposed, and decisions are made without dialogue or discussion is ‘able to contribute little to system improvement’ (p.47). It has even been suggested that, far from leading to improvements in ITT, inspection, with its limited conception of quality, failure to acknowledge ‘value added’, and narrowly defined orthodoxy of what is appropriate in ITT, threatens development and innovation (Sinkinson & Jones, 2001).

Other concerns which raise further questions over the reliability, validity and credibility of ITT inspection relate to the moderation and reporting of judgements. In Sinkinson’s (2004) study of the role of the Managing Inspector in effecting consistency of judgement and reporting, several important inconsistencies were highlighted and discussed in terms of the actual and potential role of the Managing Inspector as the final moderator of consistency. Despite Sinkinson’s (2004) recognition that a ‘positive step forward’ has since been made, in that more recent Ofsted’s frameworks have involved on site moderation meetings at each stage of the inspection (Ofsted, 2002; 2005b), during our last inspection we still felt relatively uneasy about the moderation process and somewhat ‘in the dark’ with regards to what exactly it entailed and whether it was afforded the time it deserved and needed.

On this note, Ofsted’s procedures have been described as ‘clandestine’ (Campbell & Husbands, 2000) and to be ‘kept behind OFSTED’s walls’ (Sinkinson & Jones, 2001, p.235). Sinkinson (2004) notes for instance, how Ofsted does not yet allow public or academic access to original inspection data. We contest this practice however, and concur with Jones & Sinkinson (2000), who believe transparency is crucial if there is to be confidence in the system. We furthermore support Sinkinson & Jones’s (2001, p.235) recommendation that such ‘…evidence bases from which assessments are made and moderated should be made transparent and explicit to all involved….’. In addition, the inspection feedback process has been criticised (Hardy & Evans 2000; Campbell & Husbands, 2000; Cale & Harris, in press). From our experiences, feedback sessions have typically involved inspectors delivering ‘the verdict’ about provision and have not been seen as a forum for discussion or an opportunity for professional debate. Following our first inspection in 1996/97, Hardy & Evans (2000, p.70) expressed their views of such a practice suggesting that ‘to reduce discussion of the complexity of ITT provision to an across-the-table (one-way) ‘exchange of views’ was as preposterously risible as it was unhelpful’. Earlier, Campbell & Husbands’s (2000) criticism of such a system in which decisions are made without dialogue or discussion was highlighted. They go on to argue that, to the contrary, a process designed to contribute to quality enhancement would be committed to outward looking dialogue. During our last inspection, oral feedback was received at subject level during the week and M&QA feedback was received at the end of the week. The feedback meetings lasted approximately 20 and 45 minutes respectively,
during which time staff listened intently as the inspectors relayed their findings. Much to our relief, the feedback was overwhelmingly positive with ‘many excellent features’. Despite this, during the final meeting, we tried to engage in dialogue with the inspectors over a couple of points of inaccuracy but with limited success. Evidently we would have to wait to see whether these issues featured in the written report and then respond accordingly. However, we also knew that if we did not agree with the judgment or the content of the report, it would be difficult to change it.

Finally, given the concerns over, and the limitations inherent in the inspection process, we are also cynical about the validity of the outcomes. Despite achieving a grade 1 for M&QA following our last inspection and being delighted to read that in Ofsted’s eyes, ‘the partnership provides excellent training’ (Ofsted, 2006, p. 5), we would like to think that this was in spite of, rather than because of inspection. In a previous paper and with respect to an earlier inspection, we asked ‘What did the report and the grades really reflect and mean?’ (Cale & Harris, 2003, p.156). Make no mistake, we agree with Ofsted and believe our PGCE partnership is a high quality course, but we also believe that our inspection results in part reflect the lessons we have learned over the years in ‘how best to organise, manage and manipulate the inspection process!’ (Cale & Harris, 2003, p.157). Examples of some of the ways in which we did this during our last inspection are provided later.

**ITT as a ‘partnership’**

In accordance with the requirements of ITT, all providers must work in partnership and contribute to the selection, training and assessment of trainees (TDA, 2007). Despite these requirements however, we fear that the notion of true partnership working is threatened by Ofsted inspections. For example, the consensus view during HEI inspections seems to be that it is the university that is being inspected as opposed to ‘the partnership’ (Cale & Harris, 2003). On this issue, Cale & Harris (2003, p.138) remarked how, ‘despite the requirements for partnership…. it is interesting that the base for an Ofsted inspection is the university, and the resulting report is issued to the university’. Similarly Williams (1997) has noted how, regardless of the level of control actually exercised by the university, the public perception is that it is the relevant and responsible organisation. Indeed, Furlong et al., (2000) suggested how, because schools’ involvement in ITT is a voluntary commitment and one which, if they are found to be failing to deliver adequately they can withdraw from at any time, it is those in higher education who are in effect held responsible. This point was perhaps exemplified by the questions from staff in two schools who were directly involved in our last inspection who asked where they should send their invoices to cover the time they were to spend with Ofsted.

Equally though, we have suggested that we could in part be responsible for and reinforce this view (Cale & Harris, 2003). On the one hand, we have worked hard over the years to involve all members of the partnership including school-based professional tutors and mentors in all aspects of provision and decision making. In fact, the progress we have made in this regard has been formally acknowledged in our Ofsted and External Examiner reports in recent years. Yet, as soon as Ofsted arrive on the scene, aware of the high stakes involved, the implications of the grades awarded, and that we are ultimately viewed as responsible, we tend to revert back once more to ‘driving’ the proceedings. In essence,
inspections lead us to ‘temporarily abandon the true ethos of partnership’ we have worked so hard to develop (Cale & Harris, 2003, p.144). Also of interest is the fact that school-based ITT staff appear content for us to take the lead in this way and grateful for our steer and intervention. Our experiences during our previous inspections (Cale & Harris, 2003) reinforce the findings of national survey and case study work which has revealed that, whilst the role of schools in ITT is changing and school staff are generally willing to take on more responsibility for the support of trainees in developing practical classroom competence, the majority do not want to take on more than this and are unwilling to do so (Furlong et al., 2000). As a consequence, Furlong et al., (2000, p.113) have reported how in the vast majority of courses, those in higher education remain ‘firmly in charge’.

**General conduct of inspections**

A number of specific issues regarding the conduct of inspections arose in preparing for, undergoing, and following our last inspection which are a concern. These relate to the frequency, timing and notice given for inspections, the ‘stage management’ involved, and the demanding, if not unreasonable expectations or requests made by inspectors.

**The frequency, timing and notice given**

Gray & Wilcox (1996) suggest that the frequency and scale of Ofsted inspections since 1992 represents external scrutiny on a scale hitherto unparalleled in the world. Given we had not been inspected for three years, it came as no surprise to receive official confirmation that we were to receive another ‘short’ inspection during 2005/06. Nonetheless, this amounted to four inspections (two full and two short) in less than 10 years which, for a provider who since 1999/00 had been consistently judged to be ‘good’, represents an excessive level of scrutiny.

Given the complexity and pressures of ITT and the number of partners involved (Loughborough works in partnership with over 60 schools spanning nine local authorities), it seemed to us only reasonable to expect adequate notice to be given for an inspection and for an appropriate and mutually convenient time for the inspection to be agreed. However, the Ofsted Handbook stated that ‘providers will normally be informed of the inspection at least eight weeks before the first inspection visit’ (Ofsted, 2005b, p.2). Despite this, we were given only six weeks notice of the Managing Inspector’s first (preliminary) visit and nine weeks notice of the inspection itself. As the Christmas holidays also fell within this period, this left us with just four and seven working weeks respectively to prepare. The timing of the inspection was also not ideal in that Ofsted opted to visit during one of the busiest weeks of the PGCE year. The inspection fell during the first week back for the trainees following their first block teaching practice. During this week sessions were scheduled for the trainees from 9am-4pm each day and a number of important and additional administrative and other tasks also required completion at this time such as audits, school evaluations and personal tutorials. This inevitably caused disruption to usual proceedings.

**Stage management**

Given the ‘snap shot’ of ITT provision inspectors inevitably obtain during inspections yet the significance of their judgements, we have noted previously the measures we have taken
and the lengths we have felt compelled to go to, to present our course in the best possible light and achieve our desired outcome (see Cale & Harris, 2003; Cale & Harris, in press). Previous experiences of inspection have taught us that it is best to leave nothing to chance. We see inspection as a staged managed performance and with practise, and as mentioned earlier, feel we have ‘learnt to organise, manage and manipulate the process’ (Cale & Harris, 2003, p. 157) as best we can. The stage management and ‘falseness’ of inspections with reference to school inspections has likewise been acknowledged by Case et al., (2000, p. 605) who claim ‘Ofsted is stage-managed public accountability’.

Our last inspection was no exception and we stage managed proceedings in a number of ways. For example, following selection of the partnership schools to be involved in the inspection, we went to great lengths to prepare the schools for the visits. The Director of Teacher Education and the Partnership Manager visited each school (including ‘reserve’ schools) in advance to meet with the headteacher, professional tutor, and mentors to discuss the purpose of the inspection and the issues that were likely to be pursued by the inspectors. Conscious of the disturbance these ‘preparation’ visits would cause, each school was offered a financial contribution towards supply cover to release staff to attend the meetings.

As well as preparing the schools for the inspection, we also did our utmost to prepare the trainees. All 50 trainees to be involved in the inspection, which represented approximately 37% of the cohort, were therefore contacted and requested to attend a half day meeting at the university. The meeting aimed to explain the purpose and process of the inspection and help the trainees prepare for their involvement. The areas/issues likely to be a focus of the inspection were shared with the group and they were reminded of the course policies, processes and procedures with respect to each. Trainees were also asked to bring their teaching practice files, records of mentor meetings and targets, plus relevant assessment information to the meeting. Whilst arranging and conducting these meetings were time consuming and costly, and inevitably presented some difficulties and caused disruption, we felt such measures necessary in order that that all involved in the process were well versed and felt adequately supported and prepared.

**Unreasonable expectations and requests**

During inspections we have frequently been concerned by some of the expectations of, and requests inspectors have made which we have considered to be unreasonable. Some of these have been cited previously (see Cale & Harris, 2003; Cale & Harris, in press). For example, during our last inspection, upon printing, copying, collating, checking and organising the documentation requested by Ofsted into four lever arch evidence files in preparation for the inspection, the Managing Inspector then requested for the files to be duplicated three further times in order that each inspector had their own copies. This led to us producing a total of 16 files, entailing yet more time, effort and in our view unnecessary expense. With regards to documentation, the Inspection Handbook stated that ‘the minimum information necessary to carry out the inspection will be requested’ and how ‘it is not intended to place heavy demands on providers to produce documentation specifically for the inspection.’ (Ofsted, 2005b, p.4). The information requested by Ofsted in itself seemed excessive but certainly providing multiple copies of documentation hardly seemed...
to involve providing the ‘minimum…necessary…’ (Ofsted 2005b, p.4). Further, and given
the volume of paperwork the inspectors were faced with, it came as a surprise that the
Managing Inspector should still want more during the inspection week. He requested to see
‘raw’ school evaluation data which he was aware was being gathered from the trainees on
the morning of day one.

The Managing Inspector also made some unreasonable requests and had unrealistic
expectations with regards to the selection of trainees to be interviewed. Within the sample,
he requested ‘special cases’ or ‘stories’ to be selected which he explained might include a
‘high flying’ trainee, a ‘baseline’ trainee and also requested to meet with one or two trainees
with special needs who had used the support services offered by the university. Yet, for the
inspectors to gain a representative view of the quality of the course, we would rather them
have met a representative sample of trainees as opposed to ‘special cases’ or ‘stories’. It
was also frustrating that the Inspector asked for specific additional information to be made
available for each of the ‘special cases’, over and above the information already provided.
This request resulted in much additional work for staff requiring them to produce detailed
notes about the trainees specifically for the inspection. It also contradicted the guidance
given on documentation in the Inspection Handbook (Ofsted, 2005b) highlighted above.
Our concern with the Managing Inspector’s request to meet with trainees who had special
needs related to data protection and confidentiality issues. Permission had to be sought
from the trainees to firstly share this information with Ofsted, and secondly to be
interviewed by the inspector.

Impact on university, schools, trainees
A real and on-going concern and one that, given the preceding discussion, can perhaps
be more fully appreciated, is the impact inspection has, or can have, on the university,
university staff, schools and school staff, as well as trainees. Such impact is potentially
great and felt in a number of ways.

Increased pressure and workload
A PGCE course is demanding and intense at the best of times and concerns have been
expressed over the increased workload and pressure ITT inspections place on all involved
(Cale & Harris, 2003; Cale & Harris, in press). The workload and pressure has been
heightened further by the frequent changes to the inspection framework, with the
introduction of each new framework outlining different arrangements and requirements with
which to become familiar and comply. Furthermore, these frameworks must often be
adopted at short notice and alongside numerous other developments in ITT and education
more broadly.

Whilst one might expect a full inspection to involve a good deal of additional work, the term
‘short’ inspection implies and should surely have entailed a ‘lighter touch’. As noted earlier,
subsequent changes to the inspection arrangements have been in an effort to minimise
inspection burden. Despite this, it was evident from the 89 page Inspection Handbook
(Ofsted, 2005b) we were faced with in our last inspection, that there was still much involved
in even a short inspection and it made us doubt whether Ofsted’s interpretation of the word
‘short’ was the same as ours.
The short inspection comprised a preliminary visit by the Managing Inspector and the inspection week itself, and included scrutiny of documentation, interviews with university staff and trainees, visits to schools, and interviews with school-based staff including headteachers, professional tutors and mentors. These requirements reflected those of full inspections. In reality, it seemed the only real difference between a short and full inspection was that the former did not involve the 'dreaded Standards visits!' (Cale & Harris, 2003, p.154), the details of and issues associated with which have been well documented elsewhere (Cale & Harris, 2000; Campbell & Husbands, 2000; Hardy & Evans, 2000; Sinkinson & Jones, 2001; Tymms, 1997).

From a provider's perspective, the increased pressure, workload and burden of the short inspection were felt from the receipt of the news from Ofsted about the inspection until the time we had received and responded to the draft report (a period of over 4 months). Even then, because we took issue over the inspection framework, communication was on-going between ourselves Ofsted and the TDA well after this time which ultimately led to us requesting and undergoing a grade review. The review subsequently then involved a good deal of time gathering, analyzing and collating internal and external data and other information to compile the detailed self evaluation document and supporting evidence that was required.

In terms of the impact on schools, school staff gave generously of their time during the preparatory meetings and the inspection week itself, and the demands of the inspection inevitably resulted in additional workload for them also. It was clear though, and perhaps not surprising, that a couple of individuals were not overly interested or enthusiastic about the prospect of their involvement. Recognising that schools are under no obligation to be involved in ITT, Williams (1997) suggests that schools may well opt out if unreasonable demands are placed on them. Also, and has been acknowledged elsewhere (Williams, 1997; Furlong et al., 2000), whilst inspection and quality control in ITT are a priority for university staff, they are not for schools whose concerns are with their pupils (Williams, 1997). A related concern is that, despite public perception and Ofsted’s view that we, as the provider, are responsible and accountable for the quality of the school-based training, in reality, we have minimal control and influence (Cale & Harris, 2003). Despite the above, we are reasonably confident that most schools and staff are prepared to do their utmost to perform well for Ofsted in the knowledge that they are representing numerous other partnership schools.

Finally, we are also very aware and concerned about the increased workload and pressure inspection places on trainees. Whilst staff go to great lengths to reassure trainees they are not being assessed during inspections, they find it difficult to disassociate an assessment of the course from what they feel is an evaluation of themselves (Hardy & Evans, 2000; Cale & Harris, 2003). Eager to present themselves in the best light, some undoubtedly feel the pressure and burden of inspection and work hard to prepare for their involvement.
Cost and financial implications
From the preceding discussion, it is already apparent how costly preparing for and undergoing inspection is in terms of university and school staff time, workload, energy and resources. Ironically though, during the preliminary visit of our last inspection, the Managing Inspector advised us that we should ‘regard the inspection as free consultancy’! As can be imagined, this comment raised a sigh of disbelief amongst ITT staff.

The above aside though, inspection could prove very costly to the university in other ways. For example, the time staff spend on preparing for and undergoing inspection detracts from and inhibits other important aspects of their work such as conducting research and securing publications for the Research Assessment Exercise. In this respect, as well as costs to the university, there are also likely to be costs of inspection to the individual. Criteria for career progression and promotion within the university system are heavily weighted towards research output. Yet, despite the added pressures and workload associated with inspection and involvement in ITT, ITT staff at our institution, are still required to meet the same criteria for promotion as non ITT colleagues, and to be as research productive. This seems to us to be unjust and serves only to reduce staff motivation and morale. For differing reasons, school inspections have similarly been criticised for being a distraction and interference, diverting attention from the important aspects of teachers’ work (Case et al., 2000).

Conclusion
Based primarily on the experiences and reflections of our last Ofsted inspection, this paper has highlighted a number of concerns with ITT inspection. Issues have been raised with regards to the high stakes involved, the validity, reliability and credibility of the inspection process, as well as with the conduct and impact of inspection on all concerned. In our view, these issues, if allowed to continue, could seriously jeopardize the future provision of ITT. Indeed, the situation we have faced at Loughborough in recent years as a consequence of inspection, and most notably our significant reduction in quota, has posed a real threat to the future of our course. Whilst our recent successful grade review has been welcomed and has relieved the pressures somewhat, this unfortunately came rather too late in that damage has already been done. We therefore still feel exceptionally and justifiably ‘grumpy’. We furthermore await to see whether we will re-encounter the same concerns and frustrations under the new ‘single’ inspection framework which proposes to be more tailored, targeted and to further reduce the burden of inspection (Ofsted, 2008).
References


