

The European Teacher Programme

St Martin's College Lancaster – UK

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The European Teacher Programme (Maîtrise FLE/Lehramt with Post-Graduate Certificate in Education) 2003-2004 was sponsored by Rt. Hon Malcolm Wicks MP.

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The following is an unedited original self-assessment report by St Martin's College on their unique language teacher training programmes at that time:

St Martin's College Lancaster - UK

1 National Background

See the National Background for the Open University case study.

2. Case Study Context

St Martin's College offers a wide range of degrees and teaching qualifications. These include both primary and secondary Postgraduate Certificates of Education (PGCE), flexible and modular PGCEs and the European Teacher Programme PGCE Maîtrise FLE and PGCE HSQA (*Hauptschulequalifikation*). It also offers three and four year bachelor's degrees with qualified teacher status (QTS) and TEFL courses. St Martin's is also a Fasttrack provider and offers specialist leadership training for high potential trainees, following this Department for Education and Skills (DfES) initiative.

This report will focus on the Modern Foreign Language (MFL) PGCE, the Flexible PGCE, the PGCE Maîtrise FLE and the PGCE HSQA as it these which train language teachers. These all vary depending on their timings and end result but all essentially follow the same model in terms of their structure and content.

2.1 Organisation of Institution

St Martin's operates over three campuses. Two of these are in the north of England in Carlisle and Lancaster. The third is in Woolwich in London.

The MFL PGCE runs for one academic year. During this time, trainees will spend 120 days at 2 different schools and a further 60 days at college. Trainees can teach in French, German, Spanish and Italian in combination with any of the other three. Combinations of these languages are also acceptable.

The European Teacher Programme, which incorporates the PGCE Maîtrise FLE and PGCE HSQA, enables trainees to spend a period of time in France and Austria respectively and be awarded with two qualifications. In the French case a successful trainee will be awarded a Master's degree in teaching French as a foreign language. The HSQA is an Austrian teaching certificate for upper primary and lower secondary schools. These courses run for approximately 10 months.

The Flexible PGCE is being introduced in September 2004 following the modularisation of all the PGCE courses. The course takes into account previous teaching experience and carries out a Needs Analysis to determine an individual training plan for each trainee. It is designed for those who, due to personal or financial circumstances, are unable to attend college full-time or who already have considerable teaching experience but no formal qualification. It will be possible to complete parts of the course via distance learning. The course also has two entry dates in January and September. As this course is just beginning its popularity and feasibility remain to be seen.

St Martin's is now one of 15 Fasttrack providers. The Fasttrack PGCE is a development programme for trainees who will take up a leadership role in education. Trainees will complete the PGCE and study for a further Master's module in the summer. Fasttrack trainees must have passed a rigorous application procedure and will receive an enhanced training bursary. Currently, there are no Fasttrack trainees on the MFL PGCE.

2.2 Structure

These courses differ greatly in terms of their timing and end results. However they all follow the same basic principles in terms of their structures. In the first semester trainees spend the first three weeks of the course in college. In the fourth week they begin to go into schools for two days a week. This is then increased to four days a week. Trainees spend a block of five weeks in school after Christmas. In the second semester trainees spend the vast majority of their time in schools. The time in the first school involves shadowing a teacher and learners, observing their partners and teaching both independently and collaboratively. The trainees are involved with several different groups of learners including those with special educational needs.

In the case of the PGCE Maîtrise FLE four months are spent in a partner institution in France from October to January. This time is university based with no provision for school experience. The PGCE HSQA does offer the opportunity to spend periods of time in school. However, in both these cases trainees are still required to spend 120 days in schools in order to be awarded Qualified Teacher Status in the UK. To this end they spend fewer days in college but may have to cover some areas of work in school which would normally be taught in college. This is not necessarily detrimental to their education as it means more theoretical elements are presented via observation or teaching.

During the training, trainee teachers are divided into practice groups. These involve teaching their peers and thus help the trainees get used to the mechanics of teaching. Moreover trainees are always placed in their first teaching practice in pairs (sometimes in fours). This will be discussed in more detail later.

The College will make up to five visits to a trainee during their time in school. On top of this a comprehensive mentoring system is in place. Trainees also have the opportunity to meet with their tutors at regular intervals throughout the year, as a group or as an individual.

During the first few weeks in school, trainees concentrate on teaching Key Stage 3 (11-14 years old) classes. As they progress through the course (after a few weeks in their first school) they will start to teach Key Stage 4 (14-16 years old) and GCSE (15-16 years old) classes. Finally the trainees will work with Advanced Level classes (post 16). This development in the level of learners they are dealing with is reflected in the increasing depth and complexity of the methodological side of the course.

2.3 Content

The general content of all the PGCEs is similar, even though its delivery and timing may change. St Martin's has adopted a process-based, iterative approach to teacher education. Many of the methodological and theoretical elements of the course are introduced to trainees at the beginning of the course. These elements are then revisited and covered in greater depth or in relation to a different group of learners (see above) as the course develops.

The methodological sessions of the course explore second language acquisition and different learning styles. They also focus on the developing of learners' skills in terms of listening, reading and writing.

Trainees complete modules of work on planning and assessment. The latter looks at personal audits of the trainees' teaching as well as formal and informal means of assessment as set out by targets in the National Curriculum.

Most of the methodological work is carried out in generic sessions in English (Related item: 13). A trainee's language competency is monitored through language specific sessions which also act as an opportunity to deal with common grammatical mistakes made by learners and classroom specific vocabulary. They also act as opportunities to monitor trainees' language skills and then to provide remedial work.

A further strand of the course, entitled 'Reflections in Practice' looks at the psychological and social issues related to teaching and learning. This course encompasses classroom management and pupil behaviour with reference to relevant theories.

3. The Profile Elements Exemplified

3.1 Structure

3.1.1 A curriculum that integrates academic study and the practical experience of teaching (item 1)

The integration of academic study and school-based practical experience is tackled in a number of ways by St. Martin's. For the first two weeks of the MFL PGCE trainees are taught Italian. The purpose of this is that they experience the methodology first hand and are given the opportunity to examine how they learn. This highlights the dangers of teaching in a style which reflects the trainee's own learning style (see item 2 below). They then evaluate and reflect on the theory which underpins what they have seen, and perhaps more importantly, how they have felt when being taught. It also paves the way for a number of strands which will then be developed throughout the course, for example, teaching in the target language, planning, developing learners' language, routines, etc. During the first couple of weeks of the course trainees will visit a school to observe a lesson, and see the methodological approaches they have been exposed to during their Italian lessons working in reality.

Completion of the course is partly dependent on the submission of six assignments through out the year. These vary in terms of the length and the weighting but for each one the trainees must base their conclusions on what they have seen in practice, underpinned by what they have read. They are encouraged to read widely on each subject and each assignment is in line with the general themes of the course which are present throughout.

3.1.2 An explicit framework for teaching practice (*stage/practicum*) (item 3)

As previously mentioned, trainees spend 120 days in school and 60 days in college. Those on the PGCE HSQA spend additional time in schools in Austria. The intensity of the teaching practice increases as the trainee progresses, both in terms of time spent in school and the tasks performed. The groups of learners with whom they come into contact also differ, as does the complexity of the lessons they are involved with.

The trainees must evaluate every lesson they teach and are continuously supported by their mentors who observe every lesson at the start of the year and gradually reduce this level of support as the trainees become more independent. The mentors themselves feed back on every lesson to the college in writing. This system ensures that the college is aware of any problems which might arise and allows both mentors and tutors to track targets and monitor progress. (Related item: 4).

3.1.3 A period of work or study in a country or countries where the trainee's foreign language is spoken as native (item 7)

Except in certain cases, the majority of British students training to become language teachers in the UK will have spent a period of time abroad, either studying or working, during their

Bachelor's degrees. As a consequence, and given the fact the PGCE is only for a year, it is rare that trainees will have the opportunity to spend any additional time in the country where the target language is spoken. This is true for the MFL PGCE. Trainees from outside of the UK will also be expected to have spent some time in a country of the target language and in the UK before beginning the course. Spending time in the UK before starting the course is vital as it means that the foreign trainees will already have some idea of the system within which they will be working.

In the case of the PGCE Maîtrise FLE, trainees spend four months at one of the partner universities in France during the first semester. This time is purely university based and there is no provision to spend time teaching or observing. Trainees follow courses on French cultural anthropology, French linguistics and methodology for French as a Foreign Language. British trainees may on occasion struggle with the complexity and depth of the studies, as they are at a Master's level. Moreover, the PGCE is already very time-consuming and intensive. For these reasons, it is proposed that the courses be extended to a two-year programme in which an entire year can be devoted to the PGCE and a year to a French Master's level qualification. The PGCE Maîtrise FLE in its current form offers trainees the opportunity to maintain their language competence, forge international networks with French colleagues and experience the French university system first hand.

Trainees following the HSQA also spend up to four months in Austria. During this time they attend courses on the Austrian education system and language teaching methodology as well as German language courses. Trainees also spend some time in school. For further information regarding the structure and content of this period spent in Austria, see the case study on the Pädagogische Akademie, Innsbruck (3.1.1; 3.4.1).

3.2 Knowledge and understanding

3.2.1 Training in language teaching methodologies, and in state-of-the-art classroom techniques and activities (item 14)

Trainees are made aware through the process of being taught Italian that individuals respond differently to how they are taught, and have different learning styles. Trainees are encouraged to apply their methodology to suit the learners. This may also require using a variety of different visual and aural prompts during one lesson to ensure that a high number of learning styles are being addressed. This, of course, means that trainees are required to spend more time planning their lessons and developing materials. Occasionally, a problematic side effect of this is that trainees become overwhelmed by the need to create imaginative materials causing them to pay less attention to what they are trying to teach. (Related item: 22).

3.3 Strategies and skills

3.3.1 Training in action research (item 31)

As mentioned above, trainees are required to complete six written assignments throughout the course. The fourth of these assignments is an action research task in which trainees focus on using assessment to inform planning in order to raise achievement within a particular skills area. They assess learners' performance and then develop a detailed work plan of how this area can be tackled and a scheme of work surrounding it. They keep a log of the progress made by the learners in this area. They then devise means of testing their progress, either formally, through examinations, or informally. The outcomes of this assignment will then be incorporated into their teaching.

3.3.2 Training in peer observation and peer review (item 29)

Trainees are always placed in school in at least pairs. This has many advantages for the schools, the college and the relationship between them, but it also has a number of significant benefits for the trainees. The most obvious of these is the opportunity for peer observation and peer review. At the beginning of the course, trainees undergo a small amount of mentor training during which they are taught how to observe. In other words, they are taught how to look for what they are looking for. They perform role-plays on how to give balanced and critical feedback to their peers.

During the school experience, the trainees will observe each other in the light of certain criteria which they decide amongst themselves. It may be, for example, that one trainee is uncertain as to whether their use of the language is clear in some instances and if the learners understand them. Their colleague will pay particular attention to this and provide feedback after the lesson.

Mentors will feed back to both trainees following one of their lessons. This is advantageous as it means that they will both have the benefits of the mentors' input. Also in some respects some of the pressure is taken off the mentor as the trainees will discuss problems and issues together and resolve them. Non-native trainees are placed, where possible, with British trainees because they can respond to any questions of a cultural nature regarding the National Curriculum or the education system.

3.4 Values

3.4.1 Training in social and cultural values (item 35)

Trainees are not given any further training on cultural awareness as part of their initial teacher education. Since the PGCE is limited to one academic year, there is no opportunity to spend time on teaching about cultural and society. However all trainees work in mixed nationality groups (including the courses taught purely in the UK where up to 50% of trainees will be foreign nationals) and so cultural exchange is embedded in the nature of the course. The presence of trainees with different educational experiences and ideals, taken from their country, often sparks active debates. This is beneficial for the British trainees as it means they are constantly challenged, especially when thinking about what they consider normal and acceptable. Trainees are made to think about how they can raise their learners' cultural awareness, for example, by ensuring cultural differences and comparisons are part of schemes of work.

3.4.2 Training in the importance of teaching and learning about foreign languages and cultures (item 37)

Since the schools in which the trainees are placed are often quite rural and small, the pupils are very often isolated and have not travelled outside the UK. Nor will they have had much occasion

to come into contact with non-English speakers. The role of the language teacher in these types of schools is perhaps more pronounced. The teacher is responsible for introducing the learner to a number of different possibilities which fall outside their everyday experiences. The teacher must help the learners to be excited and enthusiastic about the prospect of learning a new language, when the advantages of doing so are not immediately obvious.

To this end, trainees are encouraged to think creatively about their lessons and to make them as interactive as possible. Depending on the learners, the trainees are encouraged to invent games and other activities and offer incentives for doing well. By arming the learners with the language levels necessary for them to take part, the language itself is perceived as more a vehicle for participating in the activity. Language learning is embedded in the process of participating in the game and learners are less conscious of using the language itself.

4. Points to note

4.1 Target Language Competency

Before being accepted on the course, trainees must demonstrate appropriate target language proficiency. This is tested at the interview stage. Applicants who do not display a sufficient language competency are rejected. The language competence of the trainees is then monitored throughout the programme. Trainees who struggle with any aspect of the language are given extra support by tutors.

As the College is autonomous from any university on an organisational level, there is little scope for trainees to use self-access resources or take classes in a second language within a Department of Modern Languages. However St. Martin's offers its own self-access laboratories and will help trainees implement other strategies to maintain their language competence. (Related item: 27).

4.2 Issues surrounding the European Teacher Programme (PGCE Maîtrise FLE/HSQA)

In the past there has been a certain amount of difficulty in recruiting enough British trainees on to this course. The main reasons for this are practical. There are certain financial implications involved for a trainee who is going to spend a short time abroad See the case study on the Pädagogische Akademie, Innsbruck (3.1.1; 4.1).

4.3 School relationships and networks

Since St. Martin's sends its trainees to schools in at least pairs they are obviously working with a smaller number of schools. This is beneficial as it means the schools can really work in partnership with the College. All school-based mentors are thoroughly trained at regular intervals and they fully understand the expectations the College has of them and what their role involves. Trainees are visited up to five times throughout the course by St. Martin's tutors meaning that the schools have even more contact than might be expected. A trainee's former mentor from their first school is sometimes asked to visit them in their second school. This gives continuity for the trainee and is valuable for the professional development of mentors.

4.4 Alumni contact

St. Martin's College remains in contact with its alumni as much as possible. At key points throughout the year past trainees are invited to speak to the current trainees about their experiences and how they found the course. This reassures the trainees about their own progress and what they should expect. Many former trainees become mentors.

5. Summary

Although St. Martin's offers a number of different PGCEs which enable a trainee to teach a language in the UK, they all essentially have the same structure and content. The PGCE is undergoing several changes this year and will become more modularised. This has allowed the development of a flexible PGCE, which like that at the Open University, is designed for trainees who are unable to commit to full time study.

Main strengths:

- Balance between theory and practice;
- Opportunity for action research;
- Opportunity for reflection and peer review.

Areas for further consideration:

- Target Language Competency;
- Issues surrounding European Teacher Programme;
- School relationships and networks;
- Alumni contact.

6. Contacts/Acknowledgements

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