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13 December 2006

Mr Alan Birks  
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Dear Mr Birks

Ofsted Subject and Survey Inspection Programme 2006-07

Sector Subject Area 15: Business, Administration and Law

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation during my visit on 22 and 23 November. I am particularly grateful to your staff for all their hard work in preparing the programme and background documentation and for giving up a great deal of their time during the visit. Please pass on my thanks to them and to the learners who gave up their time to talk to me.

The visit provided much useful evidence for the good practice survey in business administration and law. Published reports are likely to list the names of the contributing institutions, but should we wish to cite specific aspects of practice we will contact the college first.

The evidence used to inform judgements included: interviews with staff and learners, an interview with a representative of the TUC, scrutiny of relevant documentation, analysis of learners' work and observation of three lessons.

I agreed to provide a summary of my observations of good practice seen in business and to suggest some areas for development.

Good practice observed

- Students' achievements and standards are good. In 2005 success rates were above the national average for both 16 to 18 and 19+ learners. College data for 2006 indicates that overall success rates remain above the national average. Success rates have improved significantly on NVQ level 2 administration but had declined on NVQ level 1 administration.

- Progression by learners to higher level courses or employment is good.
- Teaching and learning are well planned. Lesson plans are appropriately detailed, with good attention paid to meeting the needs of learners of different abilities. Schemes of work are clear and well-structured.
- In the sample of lessons observed teachers employed a good range of activities to engage learners' interest and to maintain their concentration. The activities included group work, working in pairs, use of practical exercises (adopting Standards Unit approaches involving matching cards, scissors, paste and flip charts) and role play.
- There is a well planned and interesting induction for full-time students which successfully motivates new learners and helps to ensure that the level of commitment to the course is high. Good use is made of individual learning plans (ILPs) for all learners. Targets are specific, measurable and achievable and usually span a short time period. There are good arrangements for the regular review of targets.
- There is good support for learners, particularly full-time students. Additional learning needs are identified early, sometimes before induction, and teachers are vigilant should additional needs arise during the course. Good support is provided by learning assistants who are timetabled to assist whole groups but ensure that those learners with the greatest need receive appropriate support. Effective action has been taken to improve attendance, including employing staff who can follow up absences by speaking to parents in their first language when this is not English.
- Work experience is not a structured part of full-time programmes with the exception of the NVQs in administration. However, timetables are constructed so that learners attend college for three days a week, enabling time for part-time working. Students' work experience is used well by business studies teachers. Full-time learners are also timetabled to work in the college's realistic working environment where they undertake administrative/clerical tasks for college staff.
- The range of courses is appropriate to the needs of full-time learners seeking to take vocational business courses from entry to higher levels. The range of part-time courses is to some extent constrained by the availability of other provision in some other large colleges in the area.
- There is good provision for learners wishing to pursue trades union studies; with over 3,000 enrolments each year, it is the largest provider in the area.
- The development of the Academy of Excellence is a good example of a college analysing its local and acquired advantages to develop innovative responses to employers' needs. A successful ESF bid, and effective employer engagement (with the franchising industry), has led to the provision of three new courses this year and more are planned for 2007.
- Leadership and management are good. There have been very effective actions to address weaknesses. Systematic arrangements exist across

the college to link course performance monitoring and the self-assessment reporting process. Rigorous monitoring of course quality has led to the decision to close courses which do not improve over a two year period.

- Effective arrangements, linked to appraisal and staff development, are in place to monitor the quality of teaching and learning. This has eliminated the incidence of unsatisfactory teaching and improved the proportion of good or better teaching. The college's teaching and learning intervention team and a business subject learning coach provide effective teacher support where it is needed and assist in the sharing of good practice.
- There are good strategies in place to ensure that the learner's journey from initial advice and guidance through induction, support and subsequent progression are well managed.

Areas for development:

- improve the success rates in key skills, particularly test pass rates
- develop further the access to IT facilities and interactive whiteboards to enable staff to further develop the use of information learning technology in classroom-based learning activities. Staff training in this area is planned
- ensure there are adequate arrangements for full-time business studies staff to have the same opportunities as staff involved in teaching trades union studies to update their commercial experience and knowledge.

I hope these observations are useful as you continue to develop business courses in the college.

As I explained in my previous letter, a copy of this letter will be sent to your LLSC and will be published on the Ofsted website in due course. It will also be available to the team for your next institutional inspection.

Yours sincerely

Bernard McDonald  
Adult Learning Inspectorate