



OFFICE FOR STANDARDS  
IN EDUCATION

**INSPECTING SUBJECTS AND ASPECTS 11-18**

**BUSINESS EDUCATION**

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# INSPECTING BUSINESS EDUCATION

## INTRODUCTION

As an inspector of business education, you need to find out how good the pupils are at subjects such as business studies, GNVQ business, and economics, and how well they do in general courses such as economic and industrial understanding. You will be interested in the extent of their knowledge, skills and understanding and whether the subjects capture their interest. You are likely to be able to explain your findings largely by evaluating how stimulating and effective the teaching is.

*'Business education' in schools mainly comprises the range of GCSE, A-level, AS and vocational courses (notably GNVQ) in **business studies** and **economics**, studied by pupils aged 14 to 16 and in the sixth form.*

*Business education also includes themes and courses such as economic and industrial understanding, and the experience of business that pupils get from work-related activities such as school-business links. There is separate guidance on these aspects of business education in the booklet '**Work-related education and careers education and guidance**'.*

## WHAT YOU NEED TO DO

These are the main questions which your inspection should answer.

- How high are the standards in the subjects, and are they high enough?
- How well are pupils progressing?
- How well are the subjects taught?

### Before you begin your inspection in the school

- Revise your knowledge of the *Handbook* and associated guidance.
- Make sure you are familiar with the examination syllabuses and objectives of courses used in the school.
- Analyse performance data to form a view of standards in recent years and any trends, and to establish hypotheses about strengths and weaknesses in business studies or economics.
- Study any departmental documentation which has been made available, and evaluate its potential contribution to the quality of teaching and its coverage of course requirements.

### When you are in the school

- Use the first-hand evidence from observation of lessons, looking at pupils' work and talking with them to assess what current pupils are like at the subjects, what they do well and where they could do better. Focus on the current pupils in the year groups in which they become 14, 16 and 18. Refer to the records of teachers' assessments of pupils' work. Assess what

progress pupils are making through the school - how fast it is, on how wide a front and in what depth.

- Observe teaching, talk to teachers about their work, look at their plans and records, and judge how effective the teaching is - how it contributes to pupils' attitudes to learning and to their progress and standards. See which approaches work well and which are unsuccessful.

*Within GNVQ, you should check the essential requirement to include links with industry and a vocational application to the work.*

- Take stock of the way any other factors affect how well business studies or economics are taught and the standards achieved. Assess, in particular, how effectively the subjects are led and managed.
- Make sure that your observation forms contain enough evidence to support your judgements; telling examples are needed for your subject report.

### **Literacy, numeracy and information technology**

- Evaluate the contributions business education makes to pupils' skills in literacy, numeracy and information technology.
- Be alert to situations where weaknesses in these skills impede progress in business education.
- Record your evidence and evaluations in the 'Other significant evidence' section of the observation form.

### **Feeding back your inspection findings**

- Feed back your findings clearly and helpfully to the head of business education and to the individual teachers by:
  - identifying the most important strengths and weaknesses in the teaching, and supporting your assessments with illustrations from the lessons you have seen;
  - giving convincing reasons for what you judge to be successful or otherwise, making clear how the teaching affects what is achieved;
  - showing the head of department how other factors, particularly leadership and management, affect the quality of teaching and the standards achieved;
  - ensuring that there is opportunity to discuss the findings and that points for development are identified.

## Writing the subject section

- Complete a subject profile and write a section for the report, if business studies or economics is included in the inspection contract. References to business/school links and the broader aspects of work-related learning should be included in the report where it is most appropriate.
- Make sure that the business studies or economics section of the report tells a coherent and convincing story. It should explain why the standards achieved are as they are. In particular, report on the effectiveness of the teaching. The following questions will help you to check the quality of your reporting.
  - Are examination results interpreted so as to give a clear view of the standards attained, to show how they compare with other subjects in the school, and to identify any trends over time?
  - Are there clear judgements of what is achieved by the pupils in the year groups in which they become 14, 16 and 18? Are the strong and weak features identified in the different aspects of the subject?
  - Is there a convincing explanation of any significant differences in standards between what is seen and what the results indicate?
  - Are variations in the progress of different groups of pupils or in different years evaluated and explained?
  - Does the evaluation of teaching spell out how it affects pupils' response and what they achieve? Is it clear which teaching methods are successful and which are less so? Is there an explanation of any other factors, such as leadership and management, which are significant in affecting standards?
  - Is it clear how far standards and teaching have improved since the last inspection and are reasons given?
  - Are the main judgements supported by the most telling examples?
  - Is it clear what needs to be done to improve standards in business studies or economics?

## ATTAINMENT AND PROGRESS

Your judgements on attainment will be based on **performance data** and direct **observations** in the school. Any differences between these judgements **must be explained convincingly**.

### Interpreting data

- For pupils aged 16, compare the school's GCSE results with:
  - the results achieved in schools nationally;
  - the results for schools of 'similar type' (comprehensive, selective or modern);
  - the results achieved in other subjects in the school.

*It is helpful to evaluate the trend in results over time.*

- For pupils aged 18, compare the school's A-level and AS results with the national results, including those for schools of a similar type.

*Comparison data for courses such as GNVQ business are not available, but you can comment on completion rates and accreditation at different levels.*

- Take account of the entry policy for the groups of pupils for which data are available.

*Business studies and economics are usually optional subjects, and they are often not open to, or taken up by, the full range of students. The previous attainment and gender balance may vary markedly between schools and from year to year in the same school.*

### **Using evidence from observations**

- Judge the attainment of pupils by 16 and 18 years in relation to the examination or course objectives and requirements. Use your professional experience to judge whether standards and progress through the courses are as you would typically find.
- Judge the **progress** which pupils make in each year, referring to any significant differences between particular groups, such as boys and girls.

*The evidence comes from talking with pupils, looking at their written work and seeing how they get on in lessons - how much do they learn and at what rate?*

- Observe pupils in lessons and **listen** to their discussions. Business education may feature more strongly in the sixth form than pre-16; make sure your lesson visiting reflects this so that evidence is as representative as possible.

*Pupils' oral contributions in class and group discussions give clues about the level of their work. Are their comments and answers rooted in conceptual understanding or are they superficial and anecdotal? Do they use correct terminology with confidence? Do they ask perceptive questions in discussions? Do they illustrate their answers with current examples from business and/or economics?*

- **Talk with pupils** to test their knowledge and understanding and to fill in gaps in evidence not gained from other sources.

*You could set up a discussion with a group of pupils. Your questions could explore whether pupils can evaluate investigations they have done; apply understanding in new contexts - for example, a contemporary issue which they have not studied in detail; justify an opinion on a controversial issue; make links between different topics. Discussions with pupils are particularly important for GNVQ courses, since they are assessed through assignment work, and whilst the assignment may read well, pupils may have a limited understanding of its contents.*

## ■ Look at pupils' written work

*GNVQ work will be presented as a portfolio. Take account of the presentation and organisation, but pay particular attention to the quality of the content, its rigour and intellectual insights. Within GNVQ, the vocational application of the work is very important. GNVQ work is not considered to be of good quality if it is based entirely on desk research.*

## ■ As you **look at pupils' work, observe them in lessons and talk to them**, look for evidence of the extent to which they:

- demonstrate **knowledge and understanding** of: key concepts; the national and international environment for business activities; relevant national and local issues;
- **apply** their knowledge and understanding to analyse business and economic problems and make decisions about them, and to make predictions;
- show a **critical approach**, asking questions, challenging alternative viewpoints, and weighing evidence when coming to their own conclusions;
- appreciate the significance of **values** in business and economic decision making, and recognise that opinions on an issue can differ;
- show **literacy** in the subject - for example, by using specialist terminology with confidence and accuracy;
- demonstrate **numeracy** - for example, by accurately interpreting numerical and diagrammatic information, and in analysing and presenting their own ideas;
- show **capability in information technology** - for example, by using information and communications technology to communicate and analyse information, and by understanding the wider business and social implications of its use;
- in **vocational** courses, relate learning to the solution of case studies and problems in real organisations.

*These attributes will help to shape your analysis of the strengths and weaknesses in the subject as well as the overall judgements about attainment and progress. In your reporting, remember to draw on the most telling evidence which exemplifies them.*

## PUPILS' ATTITUDES TO LEARNING

### ■ Look out for characteristics such as whether pupils:

- are involved and interested, so that they ask questions about topical issues and comment on them, and draw information and views from newspapers and other media sources;
- adopt appropriate attitudes in discussion, such as seeing both sides of a controversial argument and appreciating that opinions can differ;

- are mature and sensible in group work, but also can work independently - for example, in planning and carrying out investigations, drawing clear conclusions from the information they gather, meeting deadlines and taking care in the presentation of their findings.

## TEACHING

- Judge the quality of teaching by weighing its strengths and weaknesses in relation to the criteria in the *Framework*, and assess its **impact on educational standards**, but be open to other features which make lessons particularly effective or ineffective.

*Teaching cannot be satisfactory where pupils, or a significant minority of them, learn less than you would expect considering what they already knew. The same is true where they do not firmly consolidate recent learning.*

- Inform your views by reference to the characteristics of effective teaching in business education, where teachers:
  - stimulate pupils' interest, and exemplify work in hand, through reference to topical issues as they arise, such as the marketing strategy of a large national supermarket or a newly announced local business venture (*subject knowledge, methodology; use of resources*);
  - provide clear and accurate explanations of business education concepts and theories, using appropriate specialist vocabulary, well matched to the pupils' previous learning (*subject knowledge, expectations, methodology, assessment*);
  - challenge pupils, by the level of the work they set and the quality of questioning, to think critically about what they are doing and to recognise that opinions on an issue can differ (*subject knowledge, expectations, methodology*);
  - provide opportunities for pupils to apply their knowledge and understanding - for example, by the use of case studies and simulations, such as mini-enterprises and role-plays (*expectations, planning, methodology*);
  - ensure that the considerable number of individual assignments in business education are enriched by other activities, particularly clear and informative instruction - for example, through class teaching (*planning, methodology*);
  - make good use of the 'real world' - for example, by well-focused visits to businesses, and linking work experience to course objectives in business education (*planning, methodology*);
  - ensure that pupils have a clear understanding of what they should learn from a topic, so that they are clear about the purposes of all activities, including group discussions and individual written assignments (*expectations, planning*);
  - encourage pupils work in a 'businesslike' fashion, in keeping with the vocational purposes of much of this subject area (*expectations, use of time*);

- support pupils' research and homework through enabling good access to: information and communications technology - for example, CD-ROM or the Internet; reference and text- books pitched at a realistic but challenging level; media such as newspapers and television; and business publications (*use of resources, methodology, homework*);
  - mark written work frequently, and not just at the end of course units (*assessment*).
- Be alert to likely weaknesses in the teaching of business education - for example, when teachers:
- brush aside questions that pupils raise in class;
  - allow pupils to work slowly at low level individual assignments, or engage pupils in repeated activities such as market research exercises without sufficient development;
  - dictate extensive notes, allow pupils to copy from books and promote the accumulation of information at the expense of sufficient analysis;
  - provide dull worksheets - there is no excuse for this in business education;
  - repeatedly set homework to 'finish off', or simply to collect materials such as leaflets from shops;
  - give too much credit to well-presented work which masks shallow thinking;
  - fail to make good links with industry, so that pupils have little chance to work within a vocational context.

## **OTHER ASPECTS OF PROVISION OR MANAGEMENT**

### **Curriculum and assessment**

Most business education is based upon externally-accredited courses, which indicate the syllabus to be covered.

- Focus on evaluating the effectiveness of the planning which goes beyond the course specification. For example, planning should ensure that:
- the course content is covered and topics are taught in an order that makes sense for developing and applying ideas and motivating students;
  - organisation allows for off-site visits and speakers from business;
  - in sixth form courses, account is taken of students who have studied the subject for GCSE, so that they do not mark time.

## **Leadership and management**

The size and nature of business education vary greatly between schools. In some there are free-standing business education departments, while in others business education forms part of a wider faculty. Schools rarely bring all their business education provision and links with industry under one manager.

- Whatever the structure of management, focus on its effectiveness. There must be no question of a 'preferred' approach. Some particular features to focus on are:
  - monitoring, evaluation and support of teachers who lack relevant qualifications;
  - the extent and management of links with employers;
  - for GNVQ, management time for the co-ordinator and arrangements made for internal verification.

## **Staffing, accommodation and learning resources**

A minority of business education teachers may not have a specialist qualification, and teachers with expertise in one aspect of business education, say in economics, law or office skills, are likely to teach across the subject.

- Be alert to the impact of any strengths or weaknesses in the staffing of business education.  
*Matters to keep in mind are: updating in any areas of unfamiliarity; expertise in the vocational areas, particularly where staff teach GNVQ courses.*
- Evaluate whether the resources are adequate and efficiently used to support a wide range of courses and topics.

## **OBSERVATION FORMS**

There follow two sample observation forms for business education. These are intended to show how evidence and judgements contribute to a coherent picture of attainment in these business education lessons. In one lesson, the teaching is judged to be 'very good' (grade 2) and in the other it is considered 'satisfactory' (grade 4).

**BUSINESS EDUCATION YEAR 13 - Very good teaching****CONTEXT:**

A lesson on the marketing mix - product, price, promotion and place. Exposition with video input - illustrates Bradford as tourist centre - whole class discussion, including some complex problems, and notetaking.

**TEACHING:**

V well prepared with clear and appropriate objectives. Excellent subject knowledge: aspects of marketing mix well illustrated with current business examples - eg low priced own product labels - inclusion of numerical methods to consider pricing strategies, and good choice of problems to illustrate concepts. Good use of video. Expectations high and methodology good - skilful questioning to challenge/develop understanding and ability to stimulate class discussion - only restricted by some tendency to dictate notes rather than to encourage students to list main points and develop later. Grade 2

**RESPONSE:**

Group v well motivated by the teaching with highly positive attitudes. Students maintain concentration and are keen and confident to ask qs, challenge what is being said, put forward their own examples/arguments, and debate points with CT and other students. Grade 2

**ATTAINMENT:**

Students show unusually good knowledge and understanding of business terminology and the ability to connect this topic with other aspects of the course - eg the changes in the marketing mix which occur at different stages in the product life-cycle. Good numerical skills well used to show how pricing can significantly affect profits. Grade 2

**PROGRESS:**

New knowledge and understanding of key concept rapidly acquired. Analytical and decision-making skills and ability to apply new knowledge all well developed when asked to decide a marketing mix for a variety of hypothetical products. Good development of communication and numeracy skills. Grade 2

**BUSINESS EDUCATION YEAR 11 MIXED ABILITY - Satisfactory teaching****CONTEXT:**

Factors influencing the location of businesses. CT-led discussion followed by routine textbook questions worked by the pupils individually.

**TEACHING:**

Well prepared with clear and appropriate objectives. Satisfactory exposition: limited by lack of opportunity for pupils to think about and offer contributions to the analysis. Subject knowledge satisfactory: all the main factors influencing the location of businesses in general, and the changes in these factors over time, are well covered: but content restricted to textbook analysis with no added insights from the CT eg through use of practical, up-to-date examples or case studies which would add depth and greater relevance to the generalisations. Grade 4

**RESPONSE:**

Pupils well behaved and reasonably interested in the work without any great show of enthusiasm - partly the effect of the teaching style. Grade 4

**ATTAINMENT:**

Pupils show sound general knowledge and understanding of business terminology and concepts associated with this work, but are unable to add much if any detail to standard answers and solutions. General level is characteristic of average GCSE performance. Grade 4

**PROGRESS:**

Most pupils develop knowledge and understanding of the general concepts involved. But their progress beyond the satisfactory is limited by lack of challenge - particularly for the more able - eg to explore in more depth some of the issues that are dealt with, or discuss which factors would be more or less relevant in different business contexts. Grade 4

## ABOUT THIS BOOKLET

This is one of a set of booklets which make up *Inspecting subjects and aspects 11-18*. The set consists of:

- an introductory booklet, *General guidance*, which is for all inspectors who evaluate the work of secondary age pupils - it is mainly about inspecting subjects;
- separate booklets on inspecting specific subjects and aspects; the contents page of *General guidance* shows the subjects and aspects which have booklets.

The main points in the *General guidance* are summarised in each subject, but if you are inspecting the work of secondary age pupils you should read the introductory booklet so that you are fully in the picture of what you have to do.

The contents of all the booklets are on the Internet and can be accessed from OFSTED's website [<http://www.ofsted.gov.uk>]. This will allow you to obtain guidance for individual subjects or aspects.

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