



Ofsted Subject Conference Report: Business Education

Title: Improving Teaching and Learning In GCSE Applied Business

Venue: Commonwealth Club, London

Date: 25 June 2004

Speakers:

- Lord Stone of Blackheath
- David Butler, HMI, Specialist Subject Adviser for Business Education
- Lorraine Spector, Jewish Association for Business Ethics
- Elaine Pincus, Bushey Meads School
- Dr Sandy Hewitt, Rolls-Royce
- Pat FitzPatrick, SIMS International

Synopsis:

This one day conference was attended by 50 delegates, including teachers, advisers and HMI.

The conference focused on the GCSE Applied Business Course which was introduced in September 2002. The aims of the conference were to:

- share ideas and good practice
- share ideas about resources
- raise issues about the course
- seek ways of improving the course
- disseminate outcomes to a wider audience.

Summaries of conference sessions

Key note address: Lord Stone of Blackheath

Lord Stone, formerly managing director of Marks and Spencer and currently a very active member of the Lords, has a particular interest in the development of business ethics. He was also a member of the government working group on creativity in education.

Lord Stone made reference to his negative educational experiences at school and felt that his own talents were not recognised by a system that only rewarded

'academic' intelligence and what he referred to as 'straight line' thinking. Leaving school at 15 without formal qualifications, he worked on a market stall, before joining Marks and Spencer. He then spent time on a kibbutz in Israel where he gained qualifications and developed his thinking on the relationship between business and ethics. He rejoined Marks and Spencer and was able to put his ideas on business ethics into practice. The theme of his talk was that the combining of apparently conflicting ideas can create a strength: for example, technology and the arts; ethics and profit making. He suggested that this was vital for education if we are to create well rounded individuals. Ethical and moral issues should be an essential part of any business course and young people need to be aware that adopting an ethical / moral position does not necessarily conflict with success in business and can often be a strength, as his career has demonstrated.

Ofsted inspection findings: David Butler HMI, Specialist Subject Adviser for Business Education

Reference was made to the main findings in Ofsted's forthcoming report on the introduction of the eight 'new' GCSEs in applied subjects during 2002-04 (Ofsted, HMI 205, July 2004, *Developing vocational pathways: the introduction of new GCSEs in secondary schools*.) The applied GCSE in business was inspected in 18 schools.

The applied business course was successful in attracting a broad range of students in terms of prior attainment and usually had parity of esteem with other GCSEs. Students generally found the course motivating and some examples of very good teaching and learning were observed. Areas for development included: the need to strengthen the applied and vocational aspects of the course; greater emphasis on analysis and evaluation in coursework; and more innovative approaches to teaching and learning. The time allocated to the course varies widely from less than 10 per cent to over 20 per cent. Only half the schools visited allocated 20 per cent or more curriculum time to this dual award course. Too low a time allocation often resulted in insufficient emphasis on the applied and vocational aspects of the course. A few schools were teaching the course effectively on less than 20 per cent curriculum time by the effective use of information and communication technology (ICT), by making use of other opportunities in the curriculum or through teaching business education at Key Stage 3. Understandably, at this early stage in the development of the course, teachers had concerns about the assessment of coursework and wanted reassurance about their standard of marking.

Resources for GCSE Applied Business

(1) The Money and Morals Curriculum

Lorraine Spector, Jewish Association for Business Ethics;
Elaine Pincus, Bushey Meads School.

Lorraine Spector introduced delegates to the resources available through the Money and Morals Curriculum, which had been developed for teaching the ethical dimension in business education. The materials, supported by 'roadshows', are already used extensively in a wide range of schools. The resources are organised around five

units: marketing, people in business, operations and products, finance and external influences. They include a teacher pack as well as resources for use in the classroom. The approach to teaching involving the active participation of students was demonstrated by a video of one of the roadshows showing students discussing the moral issues surrounding shoplifting.

Elaine Pincus outlined how she uses the materials in her school to support business education, including the GCSE applied business course. Further details of the materials are available from www.moneyandmorals.org. Elaine Pinkus has also written a review of the resources in the Summer 2004 edition of the Economics and Business Education Association (EBEA) journal.

(2) Resources suggested by delegates

Delegates shared resources, including written materials, websites and computer programmes they have found useful in teaching the GCSE applied business course.

(3) Rolls-Royce financial simulation

Dr. Sandy Hewitt Director Career Development, Rolls-Royce;
Pat FitzPatrick, SIMS international

'Profitable pursuit' is a financial simulation which has been developed from a programme used by Rolls-Royce to train their managers. Two versions of the simulation are currently being piloted, one aimed at GCE advanced level business and the other at GCSE business. Students work in teams to manage two companies in competition with teams competing in the same market. The simulation is interactive with the decisions made by one team influencing the market for the other teams. Each 'game' is therefore unique. The simulation is very flexible and can be run in its entirety over a two day period or used in individual lessons to develop understanding of particular aspects of financial decision making. Very positive feedback has been received from the pilot schools. It is particularly valuable in helping students to understand the interconnectivity of decision making in business. Rolls-Royce intends to provide training in the use of the simulation and to make it available to schools during the academic year 2004-05, at the cost of a site licence fee. Details will be made available through the Rolls-Royce website.

Workshops

Delegates opted for one of the following workshops:

(a) Getting the applied into GCSE applied business

Glynis Frater, Vocational Education Specialist, Edexcel moderator, Key Skills Support Programme

(b) Using new technologies in GCSE applied business

Chris Harris, Assistant Headteacher, Herne Bay High School

(c) Managing and implementing applied business

Yvonne Hattersley, Director of Business & Enterprise, Priory Business and Enterprise College, Shropshire

Discussion groups – improving GCSE applied business

Delegates discussed ways in which the course might be improved. The following is a summary of the discussions.

Course content

- Unit 1 is felt to be too long and too repetitive. Delegates considered there was little point in investigating two businesses if they are not going to be compared. A substantial number of delegates felt it would be better just to focus on one business.
- Many delegates felt that the specifications for unit 1 place too great an emphasis on description and there is too much emphasis on business organisation and structures. This does not get students into the right way of thinking in terms of data analysis and problem solving.
- Delegates generally agreed there should be more scope for students to use their enterprise experience, for example by running mini enterprises, and work experience.
- Delegates felt there is too little emphasis on marketing, which is only covered as a functional area. This is a vitally important area in business and one which often captures students' interest. It also provides considerable scope for students undertaking practical investigations. Several delegates felt that it would merit a unit in its own right (or perhaps a sub unit within the three unit structure).
- Some delegates suggested that business planning was insufficiently represented, while others suggested there should be more on customer services, employer rights, production and entrepreneurship.
- There was a strong view that, in general, units should be shorter and offer a small range of options.

Assessment

- Most delegates felt that the course should remain as a double award to give sufficient time to develop the applied elements.
- Several delegates suggested there is scope for offering both a single and double award option.

- The suggestion was made that the two grades awarded need not be identical and that they could represent different aspects of assessment, so that combinations such as AB, CD might be possible.
- No strong views emerged on the balance of assessment between coursework and examination. Most delegates appear to endorse the need for external examination but there were differing views as to what aspects of the course should be assessed in this way.
- A number of delegates felt that the assessment scheme needed to be more inclusive of lower ability students in assessing levels 1&2. There was a strong feeling that AO3 is not adequately represented in the marking guidance and the grade descriptors. This is very demeaning for less able learners and a poor preparation for adult life and work, where they will be called upon to make many important decisions.
- Several delegates suggested more imaginative methods of assessment systems, such as the use of oral assessment, and evidence being provided electronically.
- A number of delegates suggested there is too great an emphasis on providing written evidence and too little assessment of business skills, such as team work and enterprise skills.

Other points

- Delegates argued that there should be more scope for students to investigate specific aspects of business. This would allow students to engage more actively with real business problems and might lead to higher quality work through better opportunities to demonstrate analysis and evaluation.
- In general delegates considered that the applied element of the course is not sufficiently recognised through the scheme of assessment.
- Delegates suggested that progression from the applied course needs to be considered, particularly for those candidates not obtaining grade C and above.

Outcomes and next steps:

Evaluation

Almost 90 per cent of delegates returned an evaluation form, with 85 per cent rating the conference overall as excellent or very good. Over 70 per cent rated it as excellent or very good in terms of improving their professional knowledge or understanding.

Dissemination

All delegates have undertaken to provide dissemination in their own institutions or to a wider group of practitioners. QCA will take into consideration suggestions made for improving the course when any revisions are made.

Further information:

Further details of the resources and workshops, including presentation slides, are available from diane.cottam@ofsted.gov.uk.