

**REPORT  
FROM THE  
INSPECTORATE**

**Curriculum Area  
Survey Report**

**March 1997**

***Business,  
Administration and  
Management***

**THE  
FURTHER  
EDUCATION  
FUNDING  
COUNCIL**

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**THE FURTHER EDUCATION  
FUNDING COUNCIL**

*The Further Education Funding Council has a legal duty to make sure further education in England is properly assessed. The FEFC's inspectorate inspects and reports on each college of further education every four years. It also assesses and reports nationally on the curriculum, disseminates good practice and gives advice to the FEFC's quality assessment committee.*

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## SUMMARY

The business curriculum has been subject to considerable development and change. Business courses are popular. There are more entries for qualifications in business awarded by the three main awarding bodies than for any other vocational area. Of all general national vocational qualification (GNVQ) students, one-third are on business courses. Some colleges have been successful in developing imaginative and innovative programmes of high quality. Others have been less successful in responding to curricular change and the increasingly wide range of ability and aptitude amongst the students recruited. There is generally insufficient sharing of good practice within colleges.

Sixty-one per cent of the teaching and learning on business courses had strengths which outweighed weaknesses (inspection grades 1 and 2). The best teaching was well planned and effectively managed to meet students' diverse learning needs. Students were required to develop an appropriate range of skills, and to engage in rigorous analysis of issues. Nevertheless, a significant number of lessons lacked a sense of purpose or failed to inspire the students.

Much of the teaching and learning and associated assessment failed to reflect good business practice sufficiently. Students benefited considerably when they were provided with well-structured opportunities to work with employers and when their work experience was an integral part of their course.

Most assignments set by teachers were well structured and appropriately demanding. On GNVQ courses in particular, some of the project and assignment work was both imaginative and effective. Many students produced portfolios of their work which were of high quality.

Examination results varied considerably between colleges and for different qualifications. Students' results were best in those colleges

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which operated an effective policy on course entry requirements, managed courses well, provided teaching of high quality, and ensured that progress was monitored rigorously.

Some of the awarding bodies do not provide national norms against which colleges can compare their performance. Many colleges fail to maintain reliable data on students' achievements and progression, or to set targets for improvement.

Most colleges have acquired sufficient information hardware and software to support learning on business programmes. These resources are not always managed effectively; some students find it difficult to gain access to computers when they wish to work on their own. In many colleges, the library bookstock for business is inadequate. Although many colleges have good purpose-built accommodation for aspects of business provision, accommodation for some business courses is poor.

The staff teaching on business programmes are generally well qualified for the work they undertake. However, the commercial and industrial experience of many full-time staff is out of date.

An increasing number of students who complete business awards at advanced level progress to higher education. Over 90 per cent of students who obtain national vocational qualifications (NVQs) in secretarial skills or administration are successful in gaining employment.

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## INTRODUCTION

1 The further education sector is a major provider of training for this country. The government publications, *Competitiveness: Helping business to win* (1994), *Forging ahead* (1995) and *Creating the enterprise centre of Europe* (1996) highlighted the major role the further education sector is expected to play in achieving economic regeneration. Changes in the labour market have led to new attitudes to training. Some 96 per cent of businesses now employ fewer than 20 people. Rapid technological advances have produced significantly different patterns of work; for example, some jobs now carry reduced responsibilities and are better suited to part-time workers. Within industry, the growing demand is for white-collar, skilled and non-manual workers. It is predicted that almost 1.7 million extra jobs in managerial, professional and associated professional and technical occupations will be created between 1991 and 2000. Of these, more than one million are likely to be taken up by women. Her Majesty's Inspectorate report, *Business Studies in Further Education 1991-92* highlighted the sustained expansion of the financial services sector in the 1980s and the demand for qualified entrants to occupations in banking and insurance. The revolution in office technology has lessened the demand for traditional secretarial skills and increased the need for skills in information technology. The recession and technological advancement of the early 1990s have also altered the pattern of demand for labour in parts of the services sector. One consequence for colleges in the last five years has been a considerable decrease in traditional day-release provision. Many colleges have developed alternative arrangements with employers to provide training and accreditation for their employees. The need for information technology skills continues as office technology becomes more sophisticated and more readily available.

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2 The further education curriculum continues to change. Many developments, such as the introduction of national vocational qualifications (NVQs) and general national vocational qualifications (GNVQs), have had a significant impact on the business studies curriculum. In colleges there are: new organisational structures; revisions to course structures and content; innovative ways of delivering the curriculum including provision designed to meet students' individual circumstances; new assessment methodologies; and increased use of technology to produce more robust data to inform decision-making. Some colleges are in fierce competition with other post-16 providers; others have entered into collaborative arrangements with neighbouring institutions. The last year alone has seen the publication of three national reports which raise issues for those responsible for providing business education and training: *GNVQ Assessment: Final report of the review group chaired by Dr John Capey*; *Review of 100 NVQs and SVQs: A report submitted to the Department for Education and Employment by Gordon Beaumont*; and Sir Ron Dearing's *Review of Qualifications for 16-19 year olds*.

## SURVEY

3 This survey of the business programme area took place during the teaching year 1995-96 and drew on inspection evidence from the previous two years. A wide range of institutions was inspected in each of the nine regions of the Further Education Funding Council (FEFC). Inspectors observed teaching sessions, examined students' written work and held meetings with senior managers, teachers and students. A wide range of college documentation was scrutinised. Since September 1993, 7,131 classes offering business courses have been inspected, approximately 89,000 students have been observed and 334 specialist grades have been given. Summaries of the inspection grades awarded to lessons and programme areas are given in annexes A and C,

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respectively. Forty-five colleges were visited specifically in 1995-96 in order to gain additional information on standards set and standards achieved within colleges. This sample included 25 general further education, eight tertiary and 12 sixth form colleges.

## **BUSINESS CURRICULUM**

4 The business curriculum in further education sector colleges is diverse. It caters for a wide range of students, from school-leavers attending full-time courses to adults who increasingly require programmes of study which can accommodate their different domestic and employment circumstances. Six hundred and twenty separate business qualifications are offered by 105 awarding bodies. The provision encompasses courses in:

- secretarial skills, administration, business information technology
- business studies, especially GNVQ and Business and Technology Education Council (BTEC) diploma and certificate programmes
- management and professional studies
- general certificate of education advanced supplementary/advanced level (GCE AS/A) and general certificate of secondary education (GCSE) programmes in business-related subjects.

Together these courses, which recruited some 462,900 students in 1994-95, make up the largest FEFC programme area after humanities. Business students account for 15 per cent of all full-time students and 19 per cent of all part-time students in the sector. In 1994-95, 83 per cent of these students were studying on FEFC-funded provision. The remainder were funded by local authorities, training and enterprise councils (TECs) and private companies.



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5 In 1994-95:

- 34,600 of the 462,900 business students studied part time for less than 120 guided learning hours, or followed unspecified qualifications
- of the other 428,300 students, some 23 per cent studied full time, mainly on GNVQ, BTEC, GCE AS/A level and GCSE courses, and 77 per cent studied part time
- 75 per cent of all business students and 87 per cent of those who studied part time were 19 years of age or over; 62 per cent of the full-time students were under 19
- the majority of all business students (65 per cent) were female and this predominance existed in all age groups under 60
- the two largest sub-programme areas were business studies, with 56 per cent of full-time and 21 per cent of all students, and secretarial skills with 27 per cent of part-time students, 7 per cent of full-time students and 22 per cent of all students. Over 90 per cent of secretarial skills students were female
- 22,500 full-time students (23 per cent of full-time students in the programme area) and 76,000 part-time students (23 per cent of all part-time students) were working towards NVQs.

Recently, a number of colleges have re-introduced single subject awards in wordprocessing, typing and in shorthand for students to take alongside NVQs in administration at levels 2 and 3. In a number of the colleges in the survey, the total of NVQ enrolments in this area has either remained stable or, in some cases, declined whereas enrolments in single subjects have increased significantly.

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6 Business studies programmes generally comprise GNVQ business courses at foundation, intermediate and advanced levels and BTEC diplomas and certificates in business and finance at first, national and higher national level. In 1994-95, GNVQs accounted for 35 per cent and BTEC diplomas for 19 per cent of full-time students and provided much of the regular teaching commitment in business in colleges. Business was one of the first five pilot GNVQ courses in 1992-93. Initially it was offered at intermediate and advanced levels. Foundation level courses were piloted in 1993-94. Most colleges now offer intermediate and advanced level and, although few colleges were involved in piloting the foundation level course, one-third of the colleges in this survey provided a programme at foundation level which included business. Since over 80 per cent of all sector colleges are registered with BTEC as approved centres for introducing foundation courses, further expansion of these courses is expected, particularly following the withdrawal of BTEC first diplomas. Only 2 per cent (5,700) of students in the programme area studied GNVQs in business part time in 1994-95. Potential part-time students appear to favour other longer-established qualifications which they consider better suited to part-time study. Some 8 per cent of part-time business students were studying for BTEC certificates.

7 In 1994-95, 13 per cent of business students were on management and professional programmes such as marketing, supervisory management, accounting, personnel management and banking. These represented 2 per cent of full-time and 16 per cent of part-time business students. Management courses were the only courses in the business programme area where male students were in a significant majority. The decline in traditionally sponsored day-release programmes has led to a drop in enrolments for many of the professional courses. Conversely, there has been an increase in the numbers following management programmes, particularly in those colleges which have been able to offer alternative means of study such as distance learning or intensive short courses. Management courses are attractive to

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mature students seeking to further their careers, who may be undecided about the specific area of industry or commerce they wish to enter.

8 The business programme area includes GCE AS/A levels and GCSEs in accounting and business studies. Approximately 11 per cent of full-time and 4 per cent of part-time students studied for them in 1994-95. The majority of entries were from 16 to 18 year-old students but, typically, 45 per cent of all those taking GCE AS/A levels and GCSEs are adults studying part time. The sectors' examination entries for GCSEs in accounting and business studies have declined by 30 per cent since 1992 and GCSEs comprised only 2 per cent of the qualifications gained by students from the business programme area in 1995. GCE AS examination entries in accounting and business studies rose from a low base to peak at over 1,300 in 1994. Since then they have declined by 13 per cent and make up a very small percentage of examination entries overall. GCE A level examination entries in the two subjects have increased by 5 per cent over the years 1992-93 and 1994-95. Nationally, the entries for GCE A level business studies have risen by 52 per cent between 1992 and 1996. This may be attributed, partly, to the popularity of modular syllabuses for business studies. It contrasts with a 39 per cent decline in entries for GCE A level economics during the same period.

9 The profile of the students taking business courses has changed over recent years and continues to change. Between 1989 and 1993, the number of business students in sector colleges other than sixth form colleges fell by 15 per cent. This was mainly because of a substantial decline in the number of part-time students: the number of those in employment and studying part time fell by 20 per cent and the number of other part-time students fell by 28 per cent. During the same period the number of full-time students studying business courses increased by 20 per cent. Since 1993, however, this trend has been arrested. Sector colleges estimate a 28 per cent increase in business students between 1995-96 and 1998-99, with part-time student numbers expected to rise

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by some 30 per cent while full-time numbers fall. In 1995, collaborative off-site arrangements (franchising) accounted for 20 per cent of all business students, who were mainly studying part time or on short courses. After health and community care and hotel and catering, business is the third largest programme area for collaborative off-site work.

## MANAGEMENT

### Organisation

10 Colleges manage their business programme area in various ways. Many have management teams for different groups of courses. For example, business studies, secretarial studies, office technology, management and professional courses may all be managed separately. Some colleges include leisure and tourism in the business programme. Ways of grouping courses, the teaching loads of managers, the size of teams and the responsibility allocated to them vary greatly. Many small teams have strengths in that their members communicate well with each other, share good practice and plan the use of resources effectively. In most colleges, teams are grouped to form a department or faculty. Sometimes, however, staff and students are unclear about the rationale for the management structure of the business programme and do not always know who has responsibilities for managing specific areas of work. Some colleges allocate different levels of work in business to different sections within the college. In colleges where the organisation of work in business is fragmented or poorly co-ordinated the lack of a strategic overview often means that students do not have a clear understanding of the routes of progression.

11 Short courses and work designed for commerce and industry are usually managed by a division within a large business section or by a unit which has responsibility for such provision across the college.

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Although the latter arrangement often makes it easier for the college to provide a prompt response to requests from employers, it can deny business teachers involvement in the planning of work including the opportunity to discuss and share good practice with colleagues from other programme areas.

12 In many colleges, GCE/GCSE business courses are organised separately from vocational courses and students' choice of courses is restricted; teachers tend to teach either on the vocational programmes or the general education programme. Where arrangements are more open, both staff and students have benefited. A common timetable has enabled students to construct programmes which best suit their needs, for example by combining GNVQ units with GCE/GCSE subjects, and teachers who teach both vocational and general education courses have been able to assemble learning resources which are useful for work in the two areas. There is evidence that staff improve their own professional skills by teaching on both vocational and general education courses. Students experience a greater range of teaching methods and the quality of learning is improved.

### **Management of the Curriculum**

13 Good curriculum management has enabled many colleges to sustain and, in some cases, increase enrolments. There are examples of successful, sometimes innovative, approaches to the planning and design of courses, particularly in administration and management programmes. Although some colleges still attempt to maintain recruitment to their day-release and evening courses in the face of significantly declining demand, an increasing number have developed flexible timetables and course structures, designed to meet individual students' study needs. Many have developed open or distance learning arrangements which allow students to work at times of their own choosing in the college's learning centre, at home or in the workplace. Some are introducing semesters or trimesters. At one college, courses

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are timetabled in 12-week blocks, an arrangement which helps the college to accommodate late entrants and enables students, where appropriate, to complete the course more quickly. Some students leave their courses early to take up jobs, often after completing a successful period of work experience. However, colleges have been slow to explore methods of catering for these and other students who withdraw from courses yet wish to continue their studies. A minority of early leavers take the opportunity to complete their awards through part-time study, especially where their employer encourages them to do so.

### **Management of Quality**

14 Quality assurance arrangements are developing well in those sections of colleges providing business programmes. Course reviews and regular team meetings are common features of good practice. However, they do not always lead to arrangements for dealing with the weaknesses in classroom management and practice which have been identified. The systematic observation of teaching, as a formal part of internal quality assurance, is still uncommon, but managers and quality teams are increasingly carrying out classroom observation on a sampling basis. As yet, there is little evidence that quality assurance procedures are having a direct and beneficial impact on the quality of the students' learning. Those who teach business and management courses often have a knowledge and understanding of quality assurance practices and procedures in industry and commerce because these are course elements. However, the inspection grades awarded to business sections for quality assurance do not suggest that business studies teachers have greater expertise in implementing quality assurance than staff in other programme areas. It is comparatively rare for teachers of business to be asked to provide staff development for their colleagues on quality assurance and management.

15 Most business sections have made good progress in introducing internal verification systems. The systems are effective in identifying

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problems, where they exist, but the problems are not always addressed. For example, while it is common that work marked by one assessor is verified by another, disagreements between them sometimes remain unresolved. Most course review processes give consideration to the views of external verifiers but these views are occasionally inconsistent. In some colleges, messages from external verifiers appointed by the same awarding body are not consistent and staff erroneously deduce that there has been a change in the awarding body's requirements.

## RESOURCES

### Staffing

16 Most staff teaching on business programmes are well qualified for the work they undertake. Inspectors have identified more strengths than weaknesses in the way in which courses within the programme area are staffed. Managers of college business programmes have to administer a complex mix of courses and students, deal with a rapidly-changing curriculum and accept responsibility for a large number of part-time staff. Many are new to their post and claim they have received inadequate training for their role. Most have been selected for their knowledge of, and enthusiasm for, their subject rather than for their managerial skills. Many managers have substantial teaching commitments and find they have insufficient time to discharge their managerial duties effectively. Although a considerable amount of staff development is taking place in the sector, many colleges could do more to help staff keep pace with curricular changes, assessment methodology and new ways of learning. Recently, the majority of staff development activity has been prioritised to ensure that staff acquire the assessor and verifier awards necessary to deliver NVQs and GNVQs.

17 The most common weakness in the staffing of business courses is that the commercial and industrial experience of many full-time

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teachers is outdated. Opportunities to update knowledge and skills are limited and, where they exist, few teachers take advantage of them. College managers, recognising this weakness, have attempted to strengthen the business experience of teams by ensuring that new appointees have recent commercial and industrial experience. This is particularly evident in sixth form colleges where staff have been appointed to teach on the newly-introduced vocational business courses. The use of part-time staff with recent or current business experience is proving invaluable to business teaching teams. However, in many colleges part-time staff, new to teaching, receive inadequate support and guidance in developing their teaching skills.

### **Learning Resources**

18 Teachers and students are making increasing use of modern computers and software packages. Colleges have generally invested well in these resources and most business courses have the information technology necessary to support students' learning. Scope remains for improving the management of these resources and there is a need for further staff development on the use of information technology in the classroom. Outside the classroom, computers are not always available to students at times which suit them. Most difficulties arise when computers and computer rooms have been timetabled in advance for specific use or when computer rooms are being used as general classrooms on a regular basis. Students benefit when there is a clear strategy on how resources will be used.

19 By comparison with their considerable efforts to develop information technology resources, colleges have not invested significantly in their libraries. As a result many libraries have books which are out of date. In one college, for example, students researching the European Union were hampered in their task because a textbook gave an out-of-date list of member states. In some colleges, the development of departmental libraries is unco-ordinated and books are



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not always properly catalogued. There is also the problem that the resources in departmental libraries are generally restricted to students on particular courses, though they may be useful to a much wider cross-section of students. The quality of office equipment available to support secretarial and administration students varies widely. Facilities range from modern office suites with up-to-date equipment, including electronic mail and video conferencing, to poorly-converted classrooms in which spirit duplicators are still used.

### **Accommodation**

20 Although the accommodation provided for teaching business courses varies considerably in quality, its effectiveness is usually determined by the way it is managed. In the majority of colleges, teaching rooms are allocated to subject sections and are the responsibility of subject teachers. There are clear advantages when this is the case. For example, staff make the rooms attractive with displays of relevant materials which draw attention to current business issues. In the best practice, these are updated regularly.

21 Colleges have invested significantly in accommodation for business courses. Business centres, office training centres, computer suites and management suites are often furnished to high standards and provide a modern office environment. Some colleges have modern furniture which enables the layout of rooms to be adjusted to suit different methods of working. The quality of the accommodation specifically designated for business courses is in marked contrast with the quality of the majority of general purpose classrooms sometimes used for business classes. For example, in one classroom, there were stacks of books gathering dust in corners and unused handouts scattered across tops of cupboards; in another, the business classroom was a repository for broken overhead projectors, out-of-date computers, rejected typewriters and old textbooks. For many colleges, the refurbishment of general teaching accommodation for business courses has not been a recent priority.

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## STUDENT RECRUITMENT AND GUIDANCE

22 Colleges normally publish clear entrance criteria for full-time business courses in their course leaflets. For the GNVQ advanced business courses the most common requirement for school-leavers is that they achieve grade C or above in at least four GCSE subjects. Sometimes, a grade C or above in English and/or mathematics is specified. There are similar requirements for courses leading to NVQ administration at level 3. Some colleges interpret entrance requirements more loosely, particularly for students over 19 years of age. In the main, however, colleges are applying criteria more rigorously and, in some cases, are raising entrance requirements in an attempt to improve levels of retention and achievement. Students who wish to study GCE A levels in accounting and business studies are often required to have better GCSE results than GNVQ entrants. Typically, one or two GCSEs at grade B are required. A number of colleges in the survey could not explain why GCSE grades A to C, in subjects such as mathematics, are required for some courses, but not others. Some applicants for GNVQ intermediate business courses are accepted through open entry arrangements; other colleges require applicants to have grades A to E in four GCSE subjects and to have achieved grade C or above in at least two of these subjects.

23 Colleges usually offer students on business courses the opportunity to study for more than one qualification. Some colleges have established a rationale for study programmes which lead to more than one qualification; for example, students on a GNVQ course may choose to take a GCE or GCSE subject which is complementary to their vocational studies. In other colleges, the combination of study for one qualification with another appears more arbitrary. Although most students benefit from the opportunity to take a GCE/GCSE subject in addition to their vocational studies, there are occasional difficulties. For example, some students give up their additional GCE studies because they find their

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total workload too onerous and encounter difficulties with the different assessment methods. Students on GNVQ courses sometimes perform less well in their GCE A level examinations than students who are studying exclusively for GCE A level. Some students have the chance to combine GNVQ courses with NVQs or the study of foreign languages. Another common combination is a GNVQ course with study for the RSA Examinations Board computer literacy and information technology award. Most colleges encourage GNVQ students to attend GCSE classes in English and mathematics if they do not have grade C or above in these subjects. Students on courses leading to an NVQ in administration often study for single subject secretarial qualifications as well. Some gain employment on the basis of these qualifications, prior to completing their full NVQ, as a result of offers made to them during their work experience.

24 In many colleges, applications for full-time courses are processed through a central admissions system and all or most applicants receive interviews. The extent to which applicants receive initial specialist advice from business teachers varies considerably from college to college. The best arrangements ensure that applicants receive both impartial advice from admissions staff and guidance from a subject specialist to help them make the right choice of course. In some sixth form colleges, applications are handled by admissions tutors many of whom know little about business courses and business teachers are given little opportunity to offer advice to applicants. Colleges generally make little use of students' records of achievement at the selection stage even where the information in the record of achievement provides useful guidance on the student's suitability for the course. The recruitment of prospective part-time students is usually controlled directly by staff within the business section.

25 The number of hours for which full-time business students are timetabled varies considerably from college to college. In recent years, most colleges have significantly reduced the number of hours for which

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students are taught. Managers claim that this has been a result of funding constraints. In the sample colleges, a typical full-time GNVQ programme of mandatory, optional and additional units involved between 19 and 23 hours of teaching a week. Full-time courses for NVQ administration level 3 are usually allocated between 12 and 14 hours a week, with some additional time for single subject awards. An allocation of five hours a week is typical for GCE A level business studies, with some variation between years one and two. The allocation for a GCSE subject, if taught during the day, is typically three to four hours. Inspectors found no correlation between the number of taught hours and the extent to which students were successful on their courses.

26 The majority of full-time students have weekly personal tutorials. Over recent years, more than 90 per cent of the sample colleges have made significant improvements to the arrangements for advice and support for full-time students, both at the start of, and during their studies. Tutorial arrangements for part-time students are more variable. Many colleges have improved the arrangements for introducing part-time students to their courses but few have made adequate provision for reviewing progress or for tutorial support and guidance. Tutorials are used for a wide range of purposes. Too often, tutorial time is used to extend teaching sessions rather than to provide personal guidance and support. The better tutorials enable students to link what was being discussed to their own studies. They operated within a clear framework and were used to plan students' learning and to record their progress and achievement. There is some evidence to suggest that completion rates are improving in those colleges where the arrangements for monitoring and reviewing students' progress have been clearly thought through.

27 Most colleges offer opportunities for students to accredit their prior learning. Few have arrangements which are sufficiently developed to cater for other than a small number of students. Where it works well, such as in secretarial and management courses, accreditation of prior

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learning is of considerable value to students. Where colleges have developed specialist programmes for a particular industry, they have often established excellent arrangements for accreditation. One college operates a large NVQ management scheme for local employers on their own premises. Another has developed a programme for the armed services, and both of these make significant use of procedures for accrediting prior learning.

## TEACHING AND LEARNING

28 In 1995-96, strengths outweighed weaknesses in 61 per cent of the business lessons inspected (annex A). Annex B shows the profile of lesson observation grades, by type of course, which were awarded in 1995-96. The profile of grades has remained relatively consistent over the last three years. In those lessons graded as having more strengths than weaknesses (grades 1 and 2), teachers provided plenty of opportunities for students to develop and strengthen their understanding. They met a range of students' learning needs, encouraged students to work in teams, conducted lessons with purpose and momentum, used a good variety of appropriate teaching techniques and related learning to earlier work. In some of the better lessons, students were required to take part in a rigorous analysis of issues. Teachers of part-time students, especially those on management studies courses, planned their lessons carefully to ensure that they were meeting the needs of all students. They encouraged the students to draw upon their own work experiences and used real business situations as a context for discussion.

29 Sixth form colleges achieved a higher percentage of lesson grades 1 and 2 (67 per cent) than tertiary colleges (63 per cent) and general further education colleges (58 per cent).

30 Of the sessions inspected in 1995-96, 8 per cent had more weaknesses than strengths (grades 4 and 5). Weaknesses in teaching

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included the use of inappropriate teaching methods, a failure to make the aims of lessons clear to students, inadequate checks on whether students understood what they were being taught, and an inability to sustain students' interest. Teachers often missed opportunities to strengthen learning through the use of directed questioning or by giving students individual tasks. The worst lessons had little or no sense of purpose.

31 Much of the teaching on business courses is competent, if uninspiring. Teachers often fail to relate theory to modern business practice or to make good use of case studies which relate to local business. The best teachers have an up-to-date understanding of business practice. They set their students realistic business tasks, skilfully providing them with guidance when necessary. Most of the assignments which students are set are appropriately demanding, and many GNVQ assignments, in particular, are imaginative and innovative. Students develop a better awareness of the link between theory and current business practice in those colleges where successful links have been established with employers. Levels of motivation and achievement are raised when students experience at first hand the application of knowledge in a business context.

32 Work experience is provided for most of the full-time students on vocational business courses. The business skills of students on secretarial and administration courses are strengthened when their work in the college's simulated office is carefully planned to complement work experience at employers' premises. There is evidence of real improvement in the management of work experience, including the arrangements for supporting, monitoring and assessing students. Work experience is particularly valuable to students when it is an integral and formal part of the course, when they are encouraged to relate their experience at work to their course and to draw upon it in class, and when they are set assignments which relate to their work placement. Colleges have increasing difficulty in finding suitable work placements

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for students and there is a growing trend for full-time students to undertake paid work in their own time.

33 Business sections sometimes fail to expect a business-like attitude from students and teachers miss opportunities to reflect good business practice in lessons. Too many colleges fall below acceptable business standards; students are provided with course materials of poor quality, such as badly-presented or outdated handouts and many teachers fail to communicate or set the standards expected in the business world. Some teachers give students inaccurate economic data. Others, in their marking of work, pay inadequate attention to poor spelling and grammatical errors. The implementation of courses leading to NVQs in administration has presented challenges to colleges. Many have established effective, realistic work environments but some fail to offer students an appropriate range of tasks or to require that these tasks be carried out with the rigour expected in business.

34 The key skills of literacy, numeracy and information technology are incorporated with GNVQ courses and students are provided with a variety of opportunities through assignment work, group tasks and skills workshops to demonstrate their acquisition of these. In one-third of the colleges inspected, however, students were given little incentive to develop their information technology skills beyond the levels they had already achieved on entry to the college. In some colleges, information technology is carefully planned as an integral component of the students' course; in others it is taught as a 'bolt-on' extra. In the latter case, students have restricted opportunity to practise their skills in the context of business. In the best practice, key skills are planned and assessed by all members of the course team; there is a clear strategy to determine how resources will be used and priorities are defined. In less satisfactory practice, teachers assume, often incorrectly, that students will acquire these skills incidentally as a result of completing the activities which they set them. Students following courses based in

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colleges' business units have better access to information technology facilities than, for example, GCE A level students.

35 In most colleges, students develop the skills of communication more successfully than those of number. Number skills are more often taught separately by specialist staff, in isolation from the vocational contexts in which students are working. Whilst students benefit from this experience, many lack the motivation to take full advantage of it, because they are unable to appreciate its relevance to their business assignments. Schemes of work for most part-time professional and management courses make little explicit reference to the development of key skills although some refer to the importance of students demonstrating good communication skills. It is commonly assumed that key skills are covered by the students' overall learning experience and, as a result, not enough attention is given to providing the additional support which some students require to develop specific skills.

## **STUDENTS' ACHIEVEMENTS**

### **Standards**

36 In addition to meeting the standards for examination and awarding bodies, successful colleges aim to develop professional standards, not only in relation to students' achievements in coursework and examinations, but also in respect of attendance and punctuality and a business-like approach to work. Where, in some colleges, these standards are not rigorously enforced, students' performance suffers.

### **Monitoring and Recording Achievement**

37 Most colleges are working hard to improve the collection and presentation of data on students' achievements. In more than half the colleges inspected, arrangements for the recording and tracking of



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students' achievements were inadequate. Often, the records kept centrally in the college did not correspond to records kept at the section level and the institution was unable to present an accurate picture of how many students started a course and how many completed it successfully. In a few cases, the published results of students' achievements bore little relation to other records kept in the college. Inspectors found no evidence of a deliberate falsification of records. Most commonly, colleges had inadequate arrangements for ensuring that records of students' progress were thorough and consistent. The inadequacy of the arrangements were especially noticeable where students were allowed to join courses and take assessments at different times of the year; for example, it was sometimes impossible to find out how many students had obtained their qualification in a given period of time.

38 There is considerable variation in the extent to which professional bodies maintain and publish results of students' achievements. As a result, colleges find it difficult to compare the performance of their students with that of students nationally. Students can acquire their qualification in stages over time and it is difficult for colleges to keep track of students' progress over a lengthy period. The Chartered Institute of Marketing, however, publishes detailed examination results and works closely with tutors in colleges to analyse outcomes and trends. Colleges can apply to some professional bodies for approval to set and assess their own assignments rather than enter students for the national examination for certain awards. There is generally a higher pass rate on courses where assignments are set and assessed by college staff than there is on courses where assignments are set and marked externally.

### **Examination Results**

39 Students' achievements across the programme area differ widely from college to college (table 1). The better results were achieved in

colleges which had established appropriate entry requirements for courses, ensured that teaching and course management were of high quality, and rigorously monitored students' progress. There is a need for further analysis to explain why students who have similar backgrounds and levels of attainment when they start their courses achieve such widely differing results. There is also a need for the sector to identify and disseminate good practice within and between institutions.

**Table 1. Range of pass rates for courses offered by colleges in the survey, 1995**

<b>Course</b>	<b>Minimum (%)</b>	<b>Maximum (%)</b>	<b>Average (%)</b>
GCE A level business studies	38	100	78.6
GCE A level accounting	28	100	52.1
GCSE business	27	71	58.0
GNVQ advanced business	14	93	55.1
GNVQ intermediate business	34	100	70.2
GNVQ foundation business	34	92	62.2
BTEC national diploma business and finance	40	100	79.8
BTEC national certificate business and finance	37	87	81.2
NVQ level 2 administration	50	83	68.6
NVQ level 3 administration	36	75	57.4
Higher national certificate business and finance	47	100	83.3

*Note: pass rates are obtained by comparing the number of students who pass with the number entered for the examination or award; these figures are based on data presented by the colleges; the data did not always clearly distinguish between pass rates within each year of a two-year course and across the course as a whole; the figures, therefore, are partially estimated*

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40 Pass rates for GNVQ advanced business courses, over the two years of the programme, varied from 14 per cent in one college to 93 per cent in another. The average percentage of candidates in the sample who obtained the award in the standard timescale was 55.1 per cent. A small number of students complete their awards in the following autumn term and some students register for the full award with the intention of only taking individual units. This may in part explain why the results to date compare unfavourably with the pass rates of students on BTEC national diploma courses in business and finance. In the sample colleges, success rates on GNVQ intermediate business courses ranged from 34 per cent to 100 per cent, with an average of 70.2 per cent. A similar pattern was recorded for GNVQ foundation level courses.

41 Pass rates for GCE A level accounting and business studies varied between colleges and from one examination board to another. The national pass rate in 1995 for all boards offering GCE A level accounting was 55 per cent. In the sample colleges, the pass rate ranged from 28 per cent to 100 per cent. Pass rates for GCE A level business studies ranged from 38 per cent to 100 per cent in the sample colleges with the average (78.6 per cent) close to the national average of 79 per cent. In 1995, the pass rate for examinations administered by different GCE boards varied from 75 per cent to 96.5 per cent. The higher pass rates were generally found in colleges which had opted for a modular scheme, although one examination board's linear scheme, taken by a small proportion of candidates, had a pass rate of 93 per cent. There is evidence to suggest that the modular structure which allows students the opportunity to retake modules and to build up their profile of achievement over the duration of a course, improves their motivation and the incentive to complete their study. However, while pass rates for modular courses are generally higher than for linear courses, the proportion of students achieving grade A is lower. For example, in 1995, one of the two boards which attract the largest numbers of GCE

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A level business studies candidates, offered a modular syllabus, the other a linear syllabus; grade A was awarded to 7.4 per cent of candidates following the linear syllabus and to 4.2 per cent of candidates following the modular syllabus. There is no clear explanation for this and no evidence to suggest that the different pass rates represent a variation in the standards applied by the boards. However, there is scope for ensuring that procedures for ensuring standards across examination boards are more systematic than present arrangements allow.

42 The majority of further education students who take GCSE business studies fail to obtain grade C or above. In colleges other than sixth form colleges, less than a third of students (31 per cent) aged 16 to 18 obtained grades A to C in 1995 compared with 62 per cent of students aged 19 and over. In sixth form colleges 46 per cent of students aged 16 to 18 obtained grades A to C. There is a high drop-out from GCSE courses. Too many colleges continue to recruit students to a GCSE course when their aspirations would be better served by an alternative course such as GNVQ or NVQ.

43 Examination results for secretarial and administration students are difficult to measure as many students enrol on courses which they take varying lengths of time to complete, often because of their domestic or employment circumstances. Pass rates at NVQ level 2 or its equivalent are better than at level 3, especially where students aim to complete the level 3 award in one year. In the sample colleges, pass rates at level 2, over one year, varied from 50 per cent to 83 per cent. At level 3, the range was from 36 per cent to 75 per cent and in half the colleges less than 50 per cent passed. A number of students who failed to complete the full NVQ award obtained employment as a result of job offers made to them during their work experience and/or because they obtained single subject awards. Colleges consider that employers are more familiar with the single subject awards and after obtaining employment most students chose not to complete their NVQ.

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44 In most colleges, levels of achievements on management and professional courses are higher than those for general business courses. Pass rates on the BTEC higher national certificate, on professional courses such as the certificate in management studies and the certificate in personnel practice, and for supervisory management awards are commonly above 80 per cent and frequently above 90 per cent. The overall pass rates for the Association of Accounting Technicians awards are hard to identify since many candidates take units over a number of years. Most colleges record students' performance in externally-set tests but not the number of students achieving the full award. National data indicate that overall pass rates for the full award as a percentage of registrations are as low as 15 to 20 per cent for all three stages.

### **Measuring Added Value**

45 An increasing number of colleges are attempting to calculate the extent of GCE A level students' progress by comparing GCE A level grades with qualifications on entry. Some colleges belong to national schemes, others have developed their own measures. However, in over 60 per cent of colleges in the survey, the value-added data available at college are not used effectively to inform end-of-year course reviews. In one college, a course leader carefully calculated and reviewed the progress made by students on one of its business courses, but this good practice was not shared with other teachers in the same curriculum area. Less than one-third of colleges in the survey make good use of information on students' achievements at entry when monitoring their progress or in setting targets for improvement. Colleges have made little attempt to measure the value-added factor on courses other than GCE A level.

### **Students' Coursework**

46 In their assignments, students drew effectively upon their experience of work in order to exemplify the points they were making.

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Much of the students' written work was imaginative. On GNVQ courses, there were some particularly innovative and effective approaches to assessment. In one college, an assignment set for GNVQ intermediate students at an early stage of the course introduced them to the assessment procedures and to the practical business focus which they would be required to develop. Students, working in small groups, were allocated tasks based on a case study of a local firm. There was clear guidance on how individuals' performance would be assessed both in terms of planning and the execution of the tasks set. As part of the process, the students themselves were required to appraise how each member of the group had contributed to the exercise. In a few instances, the marking of assignments was over generous when set against the assessment criteria; in particular, marks were awarded for work which was descriptive when it should have been analytical.

47 GNVQ advanced students displayed business awareness and demonstrated a broad range of business skills. By comparison with that of many students on GCE A level courses, GNVQ students' work, especially in the early parts of their course, revealed little depth of theoretical knowledge and understanding. By the second year of their course, however, the students were able to draw more effectively on their experience of work and to make good links between theory and practice.

48 Business students are increasingly required to develop and maintain portfolios of their work or to undertake projects or assignments to demonstrate their achievements across the range of skills or competencies assessed. In a few colleges GNVQ students received insufficient or poor guidance on developing their portfolios. They became disillusioned with their course and found the task of having to maintain their portfolio to be time-consuming and boring. In most colleges, however, students received adequate advice and in some instances, they have developed excellent portfolios in conjunction with their work experience or of a work-related project. Many part-time

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students undertake projects which relate to a problem or issue at their workplace. Their work often demonstrates a highly professional and well-researched analysis of the issue under consideration. In one college, students on a part-time BTEC national certificate course were required to research a problem of concern to their employer and to recommend solutions. In several cases, their recommendations were implemented by the employer, and the students were able to appreciate the practical benefits of their efforts.

49 On GNVQ courses there is often a lack of integration between units and as a result students fail to relate different business concepts to one another.

### **Retention Rates**

50 Many students leave before completing their courses (table 2) and so fail to complete their awards. In presenting data on students' achievements, few colleges set out a comparison between the number of students who successfully complete their studies and the number who originally enrolled. There was a vast difference in the retention rates of colleges in the survey which were offering similar courses. The proportion of full-time and part-time students on these courses also varied widely from one college to another although in all the colleges, most GCE and GNVQ students were aged 16 to 18 and were studying full time. Retention rates on GCE A level business studies courses varied from 14 per cent to 98 per cent. In two colleges, more than two-thirds of students who started GCE A level courses failed to complete them. Three out of four students who enrolled on a GNVQ intermediate course completed it but college completion rates ranged from 25 per cent to 93 per cent. Retention rates on GNVQ advanced courses also varied significantly between colleges. In two colleges, more than half the students left their two-year GNVQ advanced course in the first year. In another two colleges, over 90 per cent of students who enrolled on a GNVQ advanced course completed it successfully. In several colleges,

retention rates on GNVQ advanced courses were between 50 per cent and 60 per cent. The average retention rate on BTEC national diploma courses in business and finance was 81.6 per cent; in many colleges, the rate was over 70 per cent and in two colleges it was 100 per cent. In many colleges, the GNVQ advanced business course is replacing the BTEC national diploma course in business and finance. In these colleges, the proportion of students who successfully complete their GNVQ course is lower than the proportion who successfully complete their BTEC course in the same timescale of two years.

**Table 2. Range of retention rates for courses offered by colleges in the survey**

<b>Course</b>	<b>Minimum (%)</b>	<b>Maximum (%)</b>	<b>Average (%)</b>
GCE A level business studies	14	98	77.1
GCE A level accounting	38	78	63.2
GCSE business	56	92	77.7
GNVQ advanced business	34	96	64.8
GNVQ intermediate business	25	93	73.2
GNVQ foundation business	49	100	71.3
BTEC national diploma business and finance	60	100	81.6
BTEC national certificate business and finance	39	87	69.3
NVQ 2 business administration	31	94	73.0
NVQ 3 business administration	65	75	69.8
Higher national certificate business and finance	67	100	80.6

*Note: these figures are based on data presented by the colleges; the data did not always clearly distinguish between retention rates within each year of a two-year course and across the course as a whole; the figures therefore are partially estimated*



51 In the majority of colleges, between 75 per cent and 85 per cent of part-time students completed their courses. However, there was a great variation in the proportion of part-time students who completed similar courses. For example, retention rates on part-time BTEC national certificate courses ranged from less than 40 per cent in two colleges, to over 86 per cent in two others.

52 It is difficult to establish accurate retention rates for courses leading to NVQs in administration; increasingly, students are joining these at different times and completing them in timescales which suit their domestic and employment circumstances. On the basis of the reliable retention rates which exist, around 70 per cent of students complete their studies.

### **Progression**

53 Teachers work hard to ensure that students meet the entrance requirements of higher education institutions. Most GNVQ business advanced candidates have completed a range of additional studies, including NVQ units, GCSE and GCE A level subjects. The 1995 Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS) annual report shows that business students constituted 59.5 per cent of advanced GNVQ applicants to higher education. Table 3 shows the percentage of applicants, previously following GCE A level, BTEC/SCOTVEC or GNVQ advanced courses, who were accepted for business courses in higher education in 1995.

**Table 3. Percentage of applicants accepted for business courses in higher education in 1995, by previous course of study**

<i>Course</i>	<i>Accepted for business degree (%)</i>	<i>Accepted for business higher national diploma (%)</i>
GCE A level	86.6	13.4
BTEC or SCOTVEC	60.1	39.9
GNVQ advanced	47.9	52.1

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54 Colleges continue to improve their arrangements for collecting and analysing information on students' destinations. Nevertheless, the colleges in the survey had incomplete information on 1994-95 leavers. Many tutors had a wealth of informal information about students which was not being used centrally.

55 As more students who complete their vocational qualifications at advanced level progress to higher education, the percentage of students who progress to employment from business courses has declined since 1993. There are wide variations between colleges, in the percentage of leavers obtaining jobs, which are not necessarily explicable by differences in the local economy. In one college, the percentage of students leaving their GNVQ advanced course to take up employment had declined from 43 per cent in 1993 to 23 per cent in 1995. In another, the proportion progressing to employment from their BTEC national diploma course dropped from 25 per cent in 1993 to 9 per cent in 1995. Overall, between 23 per cent and 48 per cent of GNVQ advanced students progressed to employment in 1995. In most colleges, between 60 per cent and 80 per cent of students who obtain their GNVQ intermediate award progress to GNVQ advanced courses. Many of these students regard the intermediate GNVQ course as the first year of a three-year programme. Few students progress from the GNVQ intermediate into employment. Over 90 per cent of students who obtain NVQs in secretarial skills or administration are successful in gaining appropriate employment.

## BUSINESS PROGRAMME AREA LESSON OBSERVATION GRADES, 1993 to 1996

	<b>1993-94</b>	<b>1994-95</b>	<b>1995-96</b>	<b>1993-96</b>
	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>
Grade 1	13	17	18	16
Grade 2	45	44	43	44
Grade 3	34	31	31	32
Grade 4	7	7	7	7
Grade 5	1	1	1	1
<b>Number of sessions observed</b>	<b>1,850</b>	<b>2,887</b>	<b>2,394</b>	<b>7,131</b>

Source: inspectorate database, July 1996

### **Grade Descriptors**

*Grade 1 Provision which has many strengths and very few weaknesses*

*Grade 2 Provision in which the strengths clearly outweigh the weaknesses*

*Grade 3 Provision with a balance of strengths and weaknesses*

*Grade 4 Provision in which the weaknesses clearly outweigh the strengths*

*Grade 5 Provision which has many weaknesses and very few strengths.*

## LESSON OBSERVATION GRADES BY TYPE OF COURSE, 1995-96

<i>Type of course</i>	<i>Sessions No.</i>	<i>Grade 1 %</i>	<i>Grade 2 %</i>	<i>Grade 3 %</i>	<i>Grade 4 %</i>	<i>Grade 5 %</i>
Access to higher education	39	13	38	44	5	0
GCE AS/A level	257	21	40	30	9	0
GCSE	46	11	49	33	7	0
GNVQ foundation	60	25	51	17	7	0
GNVQ intermediate	201	9	38	43	10	0
GNVQ advanced	464	12	44	35	7	2
NVQ level 1	45	24	38	29	9	0
NVQ level 2	238	19	45	32	4	0
NVQ level 3	115	24	45	24	6	1
Other foundation	92	18	49	30	3	0
Other intermediate	212	24	42	26	8	0
Other advanced	276	19	42	33	6	0
Higher education	99	19	38	37	5	1
Other	250	23	43	26	8	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>2,394</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>43</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>1</b>

*Note: percentages are rounded to the nearest whole figure*

## PUBLISHED GRADES FROM INSPECTIONS OF BUSINESS COMPARED WITH ALL PROGRAMME AREAS, 1993 to 1996

<b><i>Business</i></b>	<b><i>1993-94</i></b>	<b><i>1994-95</i></b>	<b><i>1995-96</i></b>	<b><i>1993-96</i></b>
	%	%	%	%
Grade 1	7	4	5	5
Grade 2	55	68	62	63
Grade 3	38	27	31	31
Grade 4	0	1	2	1
Grade 5	0	0	0	0
<b>Number of grades awarded</b>	<b>88</b>	<b>124</b>	<b>122</b>	<b>334</b>
<b><i>All programme areas</i></b>	<b><i>1993-94</i></b>	<b><i>1994-95</i></b>	<b><i>1995-96</i></b>	<b><i>1993-96</i></b>
	%	%	%	%
Grade 1	9	9	10	9
Grade 2	57	62	59	59
Grade 3	32	26	29	29
Grade 4	2	3	2	3
Grade 5	0	0	0	0
<b>Number of grades awarded</b>	<b>723</b>	<b>1,060</b>	<b>1,025</b>	<b>2,808</b>

Source: inspectorate database, July 1996

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## EXAMPLES OF PRACTICE FOUND IN THE SECTOR

The following examples of business education in colleges were observed by inspectors in colleges over the teaching year 1995-96. They have been selected as illustrations of some of the issues raised in the body of the report. Examples of good practice appear in shaded text. Extracts from the text of the report are italicised under each subheading.

### **Simulating Work**

*The best teachers have an up-to-date understanding of business practice. They set their students realistic business tasks, skilfully providing them with guidance when necessary.*

In a GNVQ advanced business class students attend a 'practice firm' lesson for three hours each week. It is sponsored by a large national company. It provides simulated work experience, and allows students to develop teamworking skills by engaging in jobs in the practice firm which are interdependent. Students in the firm rotate through three departments; finance, marketing and personnel. The firm trades with other similar firms through a centre in Birmingham. The lesson was well organised, with the teacher setting objectives for each department. The teacher was supported by other staff on a voluntary basis from time to time to ensure that the full range of subject expertise was available to students.

An impressive session was organised by NVQ 3 administration students. This was run as a formal business meeting which covered course organisation, tutorial arrangements and work experience items. Agendas and minutes were produced to a high standard. Students participated enthusiastically. The session was productive both in terms of formal learning and group work skills.

In one NVQ 2 administration class, students were working on assignments which involved their undertaking real work tasks for the college. Their motivation had already been increased by their recent external work placements and they welcomed this additional opportunity to extend their experience. Students spoke highly of their varied work experience and how it helped to widen their competence and strengthen the evidence base for their course assessment.

Enterprise activity in this college gives students an excellent opportunity to build and practise their business and administration skills over a period of time. It encourages team spirit and provides a realistic vehicle for developing oral and written communication skills. In one session, involving a class of students from different ethnic backgrounds, a meeting was held with students taking the roles of company personnel. The teacher assisted the chair and minuting secretary to manage the meeting and used the opportunity to develop particular skills, including the spoken English skills of a student on an exchange scheme. The tutor encouraged the group to set their own agenda and helped them to appreciate procedures for formal meetings, bringing out key points about voting and abstentions. Most of the students in the group were able to use enterprise activity opportunities as part of the evidence to be assessed for their NVQ awards in administration.

One college has moved its business administration training office from the college site to the town centre some distance from college. It now takes in work, including photocopying and brochure preparation, from local businesses and community groups, college staff and students. The office also operates a booking system for students who wish to use the information processing workshops. These workshops are available at times convenient to students and take place on the same site. Students from the NVQ administration courses work here on a rota basis, some in a supervisory capacity. They undertake a good range of general office work, under the supervision of a subject tutor, which prepares them well for their period of work experience.

In this college, staff operate a 'skills scan' to check the extent to which students in the workplace can satisfy established performance criteria. As a result, they are able to identify weaknesses in students' performance and to negotiate with employers the additional duties the trainee might perform in order to correct these.



### **Developing Students' Confidence Early in the Course**

*. . . teachers provided plenty of opportunities for students to develop and strengthen their understanding. They met a range of students' learning needs.*

In a lesson for part-time students taking the National Examining Board for Supervisory Management the teacher succeeded in creating lively and stimulating work on the topic of costing. Students were divided into small groups and worked through a handout requiring them to provide answers, drawing from their own experience and from the theory covered in the class so far. The teacher moved around the cramped room and made sure that each student was encouraged to contribute to the discussion groups. He checked that students could cope with the task and through skilful coaching helped students to establish their confidence at this early stage of the course.

In one college, sessions in personal stress management are built into the full-time course for mature returners. These sessions are run by the college counselling staff and are much valued by the students.

The students in a part-time evening higher national certificate class found it difficult to contribute to a question session introducing a new topic because the recommended textbook did not appear to cover the topic. The problem was compounded by the timing of the lesson and the restricted opening hours of the college library. No provision is made on the course for students to have regular access to the library although students have been advised to visit on Saturdays. No account was taken of any of these matters when students were berated, though in a light manner, for not making the session lively.

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## Planning and Setting Standards

*... in the best practice, colleges aim to develop professional standards  
... and a business-like approach to work.*

In an Institute of Personnel and Development (IPD) part 2 class, students' files contained well-presented work produced to a consistently high standard. The scheme of work for the course had been shared with the students and the course materials available were clearly identified in relation to the topics covered. The whole course had been prepared in detail by the teacher so that students clearly understood where they were going and what standards were expected of them.

The teacher had a detailed plan for the one-hour lesson for students following the GNVQ year 1 financial services course. The students were first briefed on what was expected of them. They then worked in small groups on tasks carefully designed by the teacher which were set out on a wordprocessed sheet. Each group had access to a wide range of real-life pamphlets and booklets from banks and building societies. The students worked energetically to meet the deadline they had been set. Each group subsequently reported back to the whole class, using flip charts to summarise their points, and responded to the questions put to them. The quality of learning and the standards of achievement were excellent.

In a newly-organised text-processing workshop, all part-time students are allocated a tutor who works with the student to establish an action plan, set and review learning targets, provide guidance in the use of the workshop, monitor progress and give feedback to the students. All this is supported by comprehensive documentation which includes a student guide, staff handbook, work schedules, record sheets, task guidance, action plans and a range of first-class training manuals for software packages.

Part-time evening management programmes were assignment based. Each topic was supported by a pack of material, issued to each student, containing information on a series of class activities typically lasting six weeks, photocopied articles and a list of suggested reading. Students could, therefore, prepare for each session and were not unduly disadvantaged if they were unable to attend one or more lessons.

NVQ administration and RSA single subject teachers have a range of support materials and exercises to meet the needs of students who are at different stages of development, often devising different lesson plans for individual students or groups of students. To enable this to work effectively, tutors have established effective tracking systems to record students' progress.

A numeracy workbook designed for GNVQ intermediate students was so poorly reproduced that, for example, a + sign looked like a - sign. It also contained very dated examples from the 1970s and early 1980s. More importantly there was a complex section on sampling techniques (describing six different techniques in great detail) that was inappropriate for these students.

Given the pressures on the college to increase efficiency, it was surprising that teachers and curriculum managers had failed to review how best to use classroom time or to identify what was being achieved by students in relation to the investment of students' and teachers' time. Students' files revealed different teachers were handling the course differently; there was no evidence that members of the team had identified or shared good practice or developed a coherent approach towards implementing the course.

In the second lesson of the day, on the first day of a new business computing course, the tutor's lesson plan had to be abandoned because the tutor for the first session had already covered the work planned. because the tutor for the first session had already covered the work planned.

### **Drawing on Students' Experiences of Work**

*Teachers of part-time students, especially those on management studies courses, planned their lessons carefully to ensure that they were meeting the needs of all students. They encouraged the students to draw upon their own work experiences and used real business situations as a context for discussion.*

One member of a class of part-time students studying for the private secretary's certificate was employed by a brewery company which had recently been the subject of a successful takeover. Her experiences of the process and its consequences were graphically relayed to other members of the class to illustrate the aims and effects of company growth through acquisition.

Students in this college belonging to the National Examining Board for Supervisory Management course for supervisory staff were compiling projects to contribute to their course assessment. Each student had received detailed guidance on project management and had been allocated a project supervisor who met with them regularly and visited them in their place of work. Project work was marked thoroughly and students' progress was monitored closely. The students were able to relate the theory taught on the course to their projects and to their work.

### **Enriching Students' Programmes through Involvement with Industry and Commerce**

*Students develop a better awareness of the link between theory and current business practice in those colleges where successful links have been established with employers. Levels of motivation and achievement are raised when students experience at first hand the application of knowledge in a business context.*

GNVQ students in this college take part in projects organised through a local industry education initiative. These allow students to meet employers, to visit their premises to undertake research into business issues and to make presentations to employers when it is completed. Staff from firms provide mentorship support and students spoke highly of the enrichment which the experience provides to their course programme.

The student's project accounts for 25 per cent of the marks awarded on the GCE A level business studies course. The college has a detailed handbook on the procedures and policies relating to the project, together with a large library of the projects completed by past students. Each project involves liaison with an external organisation and this further strengthens the business department's links with industry. Standard letters are used to introduce students to employers, and employers are subsequently invited to evaluate the nature and quality of their contact with the college.

In this college, the acquisition of business knowledge, theories and techniques was a high priority on all the GNVQ courses. Teachers required students to analyse business issues systematically and rigorously. In one advanced GNVQ human relation session, students were required to apply key organisational principles they had learned in looking at the short-term and long-term goals of a company described in a case study. The students were able to use the knowledge they had acquired through their links with a local firm and the advice they had received from a local employer. Most were developing an appreciation of the role of theory in tackling such business issues.

### **Illustrating Theory with Practice**

*[The] teaching on business courses . . . [should] . . . relate theory to modern business practice [and] make good use of case studies which relate to local business.*

Students on the medical secretaries programme had a good grasp of medical terminology, standard abbreviations and knowledge related to the medical field. Their files were well presented and showed that their skills were gradually improving as the course progressed. The teacher had provided extensive notes, tests and assignments to test knowledge and help develop skills. Much of the material related to current medical practice and articles in the medical and general press. Some tasks were designed to develop students' oral and written communication skills in a realistic work-related context. Students' work was marked regularly and there were constructive written comments from the teacher. Lessons were designed to stimulate interest and extend knowledge and the students responded positively to this style of teaching. The teacher had prepared meticulously for one four-hour lesson to ensure that activities were relevant and sufficiently varied to sustain students' interest.

A GNVQ advanced business class which was studying theories of motivation in the workplace examined the application of some of these theories within the Rover vehicle group. The teacher made good use of well-chosen video extracts. The impact of the application of the theories in improving relationships and productivity was readily appreciated by students, who, working in groups, linked the example of Rover with other examples of their own. Subsequently, each group presented their ideas to other members of the class.

In a well-planned and well-executed session on the Chartered Institute of Marketing diploma in marketing course, the part-time teacher used his considerable experience within industry to introduce students to the expectations of the institute being discussed in the case study paper. The objectives of the exercise were clearly stated at the outset and students were sensitively led through syndicate activities to develop an understanding of the value of analysis as preparation for a critical reading of the case study.

In one college a GNVQ assignment for retail and distributive services required students to complete a questionnaire about information technology whilst on work placement. Questions required students to list the types of technology in use and the numbers of machines available. The exercise required almost no analysis by the students of the information they had identified. Some work-placement organisations refused to co-operate. Students performed poorly and put little effort into the work.



## Managing Group Tasks

*[Teachers] . . . encouraged students to work in teams.*

A core communication lesson for BTEC national diploma students involved a role-play based upon the issue of rail privatisation. The 24 students present were divided into four groups, representing Railtrack management, government, the opposition and consumers, to debate the advantages and disadvantages of privatisation. The tutor played a low key role as the chair but ensured that the discussion stayed within sensible parameters. Almost all the students spoke in the debate. Passionate enthusiasm was generated, all groups espousing their cause well. There was evidence of extensive research and considerable understanding of complex issues. Throughout the debate, participants managed to listen to the views of their opponents and some students' debating skills were on a par with those of first-year university undergraduates.

In one GNVQ class, a group of students were undertaking an assignment on marketing. In preparation for this the group had been given a talk from a local businessman which the teacher had effectively built upon. The assignment was supported by informative handouts and the issues were explained with clarity by the class teacher who ensured that students understood what was expected of them and how they were to conduct the work. The students were to present the outcomes of their assignment to the businessman through group presentations. The learning was well planned and activities were conducted in a business-like manner.

The work scheme and lesson plans for a GNVQ advanced unit on human resources were designed to provide a continuous job analysis, recruitment and selection process which encouraged students to apply theory to practical exercises. Students were involved in drawing up job specifications, composing curricula vitae, writing application letters, devising an interview schedule and conducting an interview. Each student experienced all parts of the process in rotation. In one of the lessons inspected, students conducted several interviews and were observed by other students who were evaluating their communication skills. The teacher assessed each interview performance after it had occurred to help other students prepare to conduct their own interview.

In a business lesson for part-time students a group task was based on a detailed case study. The task was well planned as part of the work programme and provided an opportunity for adults to obtain reassurance and reinforcement from their peers. Questions covered areas which enabled students to share their experience and consolidate their responses by drawing on examples from real life. The activity enabled the group to come together with a common focus and to develop effective teamwork.

A group exercise in business studies involved several forms of learning. The task was to make cardboard dice to an acceptable quality and price. This entailed a consideration of costs, profitability, quality and production. At the same time one member of each group recorded the interaction of the group members, using theory learnt in the previous lesson. As a means of practising communication skills, a spokesman for each group then summarised the outcomes of the task and the result of the observation exercise for other members of the class.

Students working in groups of three were asked to carry out an investment appraisal using discounted cashflow. It would have been more appropriate for them to undertake the work individually. It would also have helped the tutor to identify students who were having difficulty. In another lesson, students were again divided into small groups to discuss the liability of partners for acts of co-partners, using contracts made by the college (which is not a partnership) as references. It would have been more effective for the teacher to explain the law, give examples, and discuss the matter with the whole class.

In two lessons, students were working in small groups on tasks that were not appropriate for group work. In one lesson the task involved calculations. As soon as one student had the answer, other group members agreed without doing their own calculation and without understanding the method. In the other lesson, the task, to wordprocess a letter, could only really be carried out by one person. Little thought had been given to the rationale for establishing group tasks or how students were expected to manage the groups.

Group work tasks were a frequent occurrence in the GCE A level programme but opportunities to develop group working skills were sometimes missed as the tutor concentrated on obtaining the answers to the questions set. An excellent case study of a local firm being set up

and subsequently failing provided an interesting and stimulating opportunity for students to work together. They were divided into groups but there was no check by the tutor that the students were working as a group or that all individuals were participating. Some students, therefore, failed to gain as much benefit as they might have done from being members of a group.

### **Motivating Students Through Sound Classroom Technique**

*[Teachers] . . . used a good variety of appropriate teaching techniques and related learning to earlier work.*

In one lesson observed, the teacher dealt with the importance of cashflow to businesses. After an authoritative introduction of the topic to the whole class he used questions and answers to ensure that all students understood his input and introduced a handout which provided a summary of the key facts and concepts for future reference. The excellent relations he had established with the group encouraged individuals to contribute and to ask for help if needed. He referred to students by name and by a careful use of humour and anecdote, often drawing on his own commercial experience, he kept the students interested. Two further handouts were distributed; one a current article from a newspaper which illustrated contemporary applications of the topic and a further one from a journal which provided students with more background and detail. Students were then required to analyse this material and relate it to what had previously been discussed in the lesson. Before they began this part of the exercise the teacher reminded them of techniques he had shared with them, about how to extract key issues from a handout.

In an Institute of Administrative Management lesson, the concept of planning was effectively introduced to students through a short group task related to their shared experience. In response to the teacher's questioning, students were able to identify the processes they had used and relate these to the frameworks for planning which were set out on overhead transparencies. Students emerged from the lesson with a good set of notes on the topic, and the teacher had had a good opportunity to measure the progress that each of the students was making.

A medical secretary lesson was well planned. The aims of the lesson and the means of achieving these were made explicit from the outset. The teacher's introduction was clear and good use was made of the whiteboard and overhead projector to record key points and help with explanations. Students were provided with handouts of the documents they would be required to use in the workplace and tested on their knowledge of these documents. They were prepared to express their ideas and their answers were praised or corrected sensitively by the teacher.

During a first-year session on pricing policies and 'break-even', students gave brief verbal presentations, illustrated by graphics showing break-even points, and subsequently commented on the value of the graphical method. A variety of well-controlled activities included: the teacher and other students providing feedback on the quality of students' presentations; the teacher giving guidance on note-taking and on the use of colours in presentations; and students talking about the problems they had experienced in giving presentations. The teacher corrected several mistakes and omissions and made very clear the standard of response expected for assessment.

In one lesson, the teacher had not catered for the range of ability within the class. Instead of providing appropriate learning materials for the more able, these students were told to do the next, the next and the next exercise, each at the same level of difficulty.

After some time spent examining the differing definitions of unemployment, a class of higher national certificate students were given a handout to illustrate trends over recent years. One line on the chart was extremely faint and broken, and the key for one of the indicators was blank. This confused the tutor who attempted to explain a falling trend by pointing out a rising line. After a great deal of muttering among students one summoned up the courage to interrupt the tutor and correct the explanation.

Students in a GCE A level class were shown an overhead projector slide and required to copy down the summaries shown. As they did this the tutor provided explanations and additional examples. However, most students were not able to note these valuable additions as they were concentrating on copying from the screen.

In a GCE A level class on industrial relations, the teacher had prepared a semi-formal lecture to cover the basic concepts of industrial action and factors affecting its success. Ninety minutes was too long a time to continue this activity. After 20 minutes, it was obvious that in an attempt to be impartial and non-political the teacher was also being vague, repetitive and boring. No basic concepts were explained, and no account was taken of the lack of student experience. Opportunities were missed to examine students' beliefs and prejudices, or to motivate them to read about the subject. No handouts were used and overhead projector slides were handwritten and hard to read.

## **Combining GCE and GNVQ**

*[In some colleges] . . . students on a GNVQ course may choose to take a GCE or GCSE subject which is complementary to their vocational studies.*

In one college, vocational courses and GCE A levels and GCSEs had previously been offered by different departments which timetabled their courses independently. As a result of complaints from students about incompatible timetables the departments had co-operated to create a timetable which allowed students a range of GCE and GCSE choices to take alongside their GNVQ courses. Students welcomed the opportunity to combine GCEs with their vocational courses and there were signs that the co-operation between departments was beginning to lead to a better use of staff expertise across the vocational and academic courses.

In two colleges, GNVQ students had been encouraged to take a GCE A level to improve their chances of entering university. At the first college, examination results were disappointing. Only 50 per cent of those who took GCE A level subjects passed and the policy has now been dropped, although it is still possible for students who wish to do so to take a GCE A level subject with GNVQ advanced. In the second college, all the students originally enrolled had dropped the GCE A level subject because timetabling constraints within the college meant that they could receive no tuition on the GCE A level course.

## **Meeting the Needs of Students with Prior Achievement and Experience**

*Most colleges offer opportunities for students to accredit their prior learning. Few have arrangements which are sufficiently developed to cater for other than a small number of students.*

In one college, the business administration workshop provided good opportunities for students to gain credit for their prior learning. The workshop operated on a flexible basis and students could enrol for as many or as few hours as they wished within the programme agreed between the student and tutor. The workshop, open daytimes and evenings, provided students with a flexible programme to meet both their domestic circumstances and their needs for skills and knowledge. The support provided by tutors enabled the students to gain confidence in putting together their portfolios of evidence to demonstrate the experience they had gained in their previous work.

In one college, adult students were recruited to a short course of 15 hours a week over 10 weeks in which the whole learning time was devoted to developing information technology skills of database, wordprocessing and spreadsheet applications. Students had brought with them different levels of experience of information technology; most either had a secretarial background or had worked with computers in their previous employment. The pace of teaching was slow; little recognition was given to students' prior knowledge of information technology and many students could have achieved at a higher level in the time allocated.



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**Published by the  
Further Education  
Funding Council**

**March 1997**

**Cheylesmore House  
Quinton Road  
Coventry CV1 2WT**