

# Identifying good practice: a survey of business, administration and law in colleges

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This report details those aspects of the provision for business, administration and law in colleges which enable post-16 students to make good progress. Between September 2006 and March 2007, inspectors visited 23 colleges which had been judged to be outstanding or good in their most recent inspections. The report gives examples of good practice and recommendations for improvement.

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**Age group:** 16–18 and 19+

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**Published:** January 2008

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**Reference no:** 070026

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Reference no. 070026

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## Executive summary

Between September 2006 and March 2007, Her Majesty's Inspectors and Additional Inspectors visited 23 colleges to survey good practice in courses in business, administration and law. The colleges were selected because Ofsted had judged them to be outstanding or good in the most recent inspection of business courses.

The survey focused on three areas identified previously in business courses as in need of improvement.

- teaching and learning, including using information learning technology to meet the needs of all students
- guidance and support and the monitoring of students' progress to enable them to meet realistic and challenging targets
- using employers, current business practice and students' experiences of work to enhance the courses.

In almost every college visited for the survey, students were successful in their examinations as a result of consistently good teaching and very high quality guidance and support. Much of the teaching was good, with some examples of outstanding practice when teachers used imaginative approaches to engage students and make the subject enjoyable. Teachers set realistic but challenging targets and students were highly motivated. Regular reviews and assessments, close monitoring, effective support and challenging tasks for the more able allowed all students to make progress that was at least good. However, teachers did not always plan appropriate extension work, particularly for those students who had previously studied a business course.

Several of the colleges visited had strong links with local businesses to enhance students' understanding and their application of theory. However, most of the colleges recognised that business links was an area to be developed further. The use of information learning technology to support teaching was good, but overall it was not used sufficiently to enhance students' independent learning.

Students of all abilities benefited from outstanding support. Learning support tutors were used effectively in class and in additional support lessons. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, as well as those who required extra work to achieve high grades, were well supported. Support for students outside the classroom was very good. Teachers focused on developing students' interest in and enjoyment of the subject and a wider understanding of business theory in order to improve their analytical skills and examination technique. However, opportunities for work experience were limited in almost all the colleges visited, except in vocational courses.

Leadership and management were very good. Heads of department had high expectations. They monitored quality of provision closely, established a strong team ethos among their staff and encouraged innovation. Self-assessment was robust.

Action plans set challenging targets and were monitored rigorously. Managers placed a strong emphasis on staff development, but there were not enough opportunities for teachers to update their professional skills and gain industrial experience.

The report provides a number of examples of very good practice, illustrating in particular effective approaches to teaching and learning.

## Key findings

- Very good personal and academic support, including peer mentoring, contributed significantly to students' enjoyment of the subject, their success in examinations and the completion of high quality coursework and portfolios.
- A wide variety of learning activities and stimulating enrichment opportunities challenged and engaged students, developing their understanding of and interest in the subject and its practical application.
- Strong curriculum leadership promoted a culture of critical self-evaluation and continuous improvement.
- All the colleges made considerable efforts to ensure that students were enrolled on the appropriate courses. This contributed to high retention rates and achievement. Highly effective induction procedures enabled students to settle quickly into college and their business, administration and law courses.
- The business, administration and law courses were well structured with a very good range of high quality resources. The further education colleges offered a good range of courses with clear progression routes between courses at different levels. Many colleges had developed specific business courses to meet the needs of the local area.
- The quality of teaching and learning was mostly good, with some examples of outstanding practice. However, teaching and learning did not always recognise sufficiently the needs of students who had previously studied a business course.
- Teachers had developed imaginative ways of checking individual students' learning during lessons which also encouraged them to take greater responsibility for their own learning. An extensive range of high quality resources, including intranet sites and teachers' material available in the form of podcasts, supported students' learning. Students valued the opportunity to access information in different forms.
- Support for students was a major strength in the colleges visited. The pastoral and academic review processes were rigorous and tutors monitored students' progress regularly. The processes were effective in identifying individual needs, providing appropriate support and ensuring that students met realistic but challenging targets. Many of the colleges had sophisticated systems to identify students who might be at risk of underachieving.
- A wide range of employers and students' experiences of work were used to enhance courses and provide up to date and realistic business examples.

- The potential of information learning technology to promote students' independent learning was not always exploited fully enough. Constraints included insufficient computers for the size of the group, a lack of data projectors or interactive whiteboards in classrooms, or problems with a college's intranet.
- The colleges surveyed placed a strong emphasis on staff development and managers saw this as a major factor in achieving high standards. Staff were encouraged to update their knowledge and improve their teaching methods. However, a few of the 23 colleges did not provide sufficient opportunities for staff to update their professional skills and gain relevant industrial experience.

## Recommendations

The survey identified many aspects of good practice in colleges with good or outstanding business, administration and law provision. To improve the quality of provision further, the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF), the Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills (DIUS) and the Quality Improvement Agency (QIA) should:

- take steps to disseminate further good practice in business, administration and law so that all colleges might learn from the best practice
- support colleges in providing regular professional and industrial updating for staff.

All colleges should:

- disseminate good practice and develop the use of information learning technology in promoting effective learning
- improve links with local businesses to enhance students' understanding and application of business theory
- develop extension work for students who have previously studied a business course to ensure that they remain motivated and engaged
- enhance opportunities for teachers to keep up to date with professional skills and industry practices.

## Factors contributing to good quality provision

### Achievement, retention and progression

1. The majority of the colleges in the survey had been successful in maintaining high standards. Students' achievement was outstanding in eight and good in 11 of the 23 colleges. In four of the colleges, achievement had fallen since the previous inspection and was satisfactory. The colleges had recognised this in their self-assessment and had established appropriate improvement strategies.
2. Pass rates were consistently above national averages on most of the full-time courses, including GCE AS and A levels and vocational business courses.

Students often made good or better progress on their courses and the value-added figures were mostly positive. Students' success rates on management and professional courses were outstanding. The success rates of apprentices in work-based learning provision had improved in most of the colleges and were generally good.

3. Retention rates were well above national averages because the colleges spent considerable time and effort in ensuring that students were enrolled on courses that were suitable for them. Very effective systems were used to monitor and follow up non-attendance, which contributed to improved retention rates.
4. In the colleges which offered applied GCSE and applied A levels, students performed better on coursework modules than examination units. Analysing these results had enabled several of the colleges visited to adopt the most appropriate form of assessment to enable students to attain the best results.
5. Teachers spent considerable time in supporting students to improve the quality of their written work. However, the correction of spelling and grammar was not done consistently. Teachers prepared students well for the different types of examination questions and extra revision sessions were very well attended. In AS and A2 courses, students could present well reasoned arguments with good application to real and relevant examples. The more able students could use a variety of examples to demonstrate their ability to analyse and evaluate complex issues. Professional standards of work were expected on business administration courses, with a strong emphasis on good organisation and clear presentation of accurate work. Students on management courses used their practical experiences at work well to solve business problems and improve their competences.
6. The majority of students continued with their study of business, administration and law at a higher level, either at the same college, at university or as part of training at work. Progression from A-level courses to related degree courses was very good. Most students at sixth form colleges in the survey which offered intermediate level courses remained at college for three years and progressed to an advanced level course.

## **Enrolment and induction**

### **Enrolment**

7. The colleges in the survey made considerable efforts to ensure that students enrolled on the correct course; they distinguished clearly between academic and vocational courses. The colleges had formed productive links with secondary schools, which helped the transition to post-16 learning. Students benefited from individual pre-enrolment guidance interviews to discuss the most suitable options, often with staff who had experience of teaching business studies. Entry criteria for each course were clearly understood. Students who

were at risk of not succeeding on the course were identified at an early stage for extra support and monitoring.

### **Pre-enrolment taster week**

Prospective students from local schools attended the college for a week in July, after their GCSE examinations. Students who had chosen to study a business course spent one day on a variety of stimulating pre-enrolment business activities, including problem-solving, working in teams, researching information about local businesses and presenting ideas. The activities clarified students' understanding of the differences between academic and vocational courses. At the end of the day, each student had an individual interview with a business teacher to discuss the range of options available. The support helped students make the right choices, resulting in very few course changes after enrolment and few students failing to complete their course.

## **Induction**

8. Highly effective induction enabled students to settle quickly into college and their business courses. During the survey, they commented that they felt highly motivated by their early experience of college life. They felt they had got to know their teachers well and formed good relationships with other students and that this was very important to them. They understood what the college expected from them and what they would receive from the college. They had a very good understanding of their business courses and how they would prepare them for career options. Students had participated in a range of enjoyable activities which focused on course and college orientation; they had also developed study skills and received an initial assessment of their capabilities. In three of the colleges, the activities included team building, organisation and leadership tasks at outward bound centres. The whole process was geared towards setting clear standards in terms of students' behaviour, respect for others, attitudes and performance.
9. The best induction programmes enabled staff to build up a profile of individual students' skills, preferred ways of learning and specific needs.

### **Highly effective induction programme and skills assessment**

A welcome pack and induction booklet supported students very well at the start of their course. A very good range of learning activities, links to relevant websites and details about the course were intertwined with regular assessments. At the end of the induction, students had a very clear understanding of their abilities and skills of research, presentation, time management, organisation, information technology and standard of written work in relation to the course requirements. Teachers used the detailed picture to set challenging and realistic targets on areas to



develop, and monitored individual students' progress from the very start of their course.

10. A small number of the students in the survey felt that some of the work repeated what they had done previously. This occurred when colleges had not carefully considered the differing needs of students some of whom had not previously studied a business course.

### Teaching and learning

11. Teaching and learning were consistently good in the colleges surveyed, with many outstanding features. During the survey, inspectors observed 122 lessons; approximately two out of 10 lessons were judged to be outstanding and just over six out of 10 were good. Many of the lessons showed how business study is relevant and can be interesting. Many of the teachers in the survey had relevant industrial or commercial experience and used this successfully to bring topics to life. Part-time lecturers were often practising managers or professionals such as accountants and lawyers.
12. Lessons were well planned and clear learning objectives were linked to detailed schemes of work. Teachers used their excellent subject knowledge to plan and teach lessons with a strong emphasis on learning. Such lessons, often conducted at a very good pace, engaged students very successfully.

#### **Research to develop students' depth of understanding and analysis**

In a very well structured business lesson, the objective was to learn about the functions of trade unions. Students were split into teams to find the answer to questions. Examples of the technical vocabulary needed were displayed. The teacher successfully introduced a competitive element to encourage students to work more effectively as teams. Students read and scanned recent and relevant articles from newspapers and professional journals at impressive speed. They could apply their knowledge accurately and in detail and enjoyed the active learning. Their responses showed their very good understanding and analysis of the information. They made very good progress in achieving the objectives.

13. Teachers had high expectations of what their students could do in lessons. Their very effective questioning deepened students' understanding and skills in analysis and evaluation. They were often skilled in asking follow-up questions and developing students' confidence, which encouraged very good contributions to discussions. In one A-level law lesson, for example, students researched cases to illustrate aspects and principles of causation in criminal law and prepared a presentation on the facts, decisions and legal principles from the case studies. There was some very good discussion of legal causation. The teacher asked searching questions, and the students in turn asked well considered questions of the teacher and each other. They showed a good

understanding of the law and confidence in presenting clear and well argued cases.

14. A good range of starter activities, such as quizzes, true/false questions and 'bingo' style games to test students' knowledge of definitions, provided prompt and purposeful starts to lessons. One key feature of many lessons was to introduce activities to help maintain students' motivation and a good pace of learning; this included group work, working in pairs, practical exercises, presentations, visiting speakers, business games and role play.

**Role play to develop students' confidence and communication skills and provide assessment evidence on customer service**

Teachers used role play effectively to develop students' confidence and communication skills and to provide assessment evidence of customer service. Students took part in a series of role plays, playing the part of a customer, a sales assistant dealing with a customer, and an observer who had to evaluate the effectiveness of those in role. Students had completed preparatory research so that, while in role as a sales assistant, they could speak with authority about their products and, as a customer, could ask searching questions to test the sales assistant's knowledge. The teacher had chosen foreign holidays as the product: students were able to use their prior knowledge but found themselves in unfamiliar roles and so the tasks were more of a challenge. Observers used a well constructed checklist to assess their peers' performance. In doing this, students gained a better understanding of their own strengths and weaknesses and developed useful communication skills in providing structured feedback on the standard of customer service skills.

15. Teachers planned and managed group work effectively. They had a very good rapport with their students and they had thought carefully about the impact of such work on their learning. The main strengths of the lessons involving group work students' effective work in a cooperative and competitive business environment. They listened carefully to each other's ideas and presented arguments, often backed up by examples, to reach a valid conclusion.

**Use of group work to promote team work, learning and leadership skills**

The class was split into two groups to compete against each other in a marketing quiz, based on a television show. This used PowerPoint and the interactive whiteboard. A team leader was appointed and students had to contribute their suggested answers to the questions using mini-whiteboards. The teacher acted as the quiz host and skilfully used her expert business knowledge and rapport with the class to involve everyone in a fast and interesting way. Students provided an explanation of their points to convince their team leader on the right answer. They cooperated

effectively and showed good skills of analysis and application. They recognised that, as well as testing their marketing knowledge, they were developing other useful skills, such as working together, communicating, negotiating, being a leader and managing a group, which would be useful to a business and their future. The students commented that they thoroughly enjoyed interactive quiz lessons, particularly when they had devised the quiz and the questions to be used by their peers.

16. Imaginative teaching engaged students and used up to date and relevant business examples. For example, a lesson on ratio analysis was made far more meaningful for students by using real data. Students were split into three groups, each having the data for a different branch of a company. Each group had to prepare a presentation to demonstrate that they could analyse the data using various ratios and use the information to make decisions about the performance of their branch.
17. Innovative approaches were seen in the colleges visited, sometimes the result of initiatives from managers. In one college, for example, teachers had reviewed how to teach and assess the national vocational qualification (NVQ) competency criteria. Creative activities were used to deal with the competences and encourage students to gather their personal portfolio evidence in a realistic, relevant and timely way. Students commented that the course was now much better, as they were doing more than simply recording their work in a file.
18. In a small number of lessons, teachers did not allow enough time at the end to summarise and check on learning. In contrast one college used an effective system to check individuals' learning: students were given time to reflect at the end of the lesson and write down three key learning points which were checked by the teacher. They made good use of the information as helpful starting points for the next lesson. Students commented that the system worked well because it encouraged them to take responsibility for their own learning and remain focused.
19. High quality learning and support materials, which were often produced in-house, supported learning effectively. The professional presentation standards of teachers' worksheets and assignment briefs met students' needs very effectively and contributed to the sense of high expectations. In one college, teachers were responsible for particular modules and developed assignments, resources and assessments for the rest of the teaching team to use. They evaluated each other's materials and suggested improvements. In three of the colleges visited, key notes and revision material had been developed by teachers and students as podcasts so that students could access these with their MP3 players. The students were very enthusiastic about this alternative way of learning that they could do any time and anywhere.

20. Most students, encouraged by their teachers, showed a wider interest in business. In one college, the law, business and economics lessons started with a few minutes on relevant current items in the news, although not necessarily linked to the rest of the lesson. Teachers and students used the BBC website and other Internet sources successfully to find relevant topics. Students clearly enjoyed applying a business concept to current issues and felt that this helped to keep the subjects 'live' and relevant. In the following example a college used the business programme to pilot a 'one in five' initiative to make teaching and learning more interesting and encourage students to apply their understanding to current business issues.

**Encouraging students to apply their understanding to current business issues**

One hour of the five available each week had been given over to an activity which was not necessarily part of the topic currently being taught on the A-level syllabus. Students had to bring in an article from a local or national newspaper, say why they found it interesting and lead a class discussion. Then they applied relevant business theory to analyse the article in more depth. Teachers commented to inspectors that students' interest and written work in business had improved during the trial, which was being extended across other subjects.

**Realistic simulation to develop students' understanding of how theory fits into the real world**

Students had the opportunity to engage in a realistic simulation of court practice in the local Crown Court. They made an introductory visit to observe proceedings, which was then followed up by a two-day programme where they took over the Court premises for a simulation. A working judge presided over the proceedings. Students were given the details of actual cases, which were made anonymous, to prepare for their roles as prosecutor, defence and jury. Students were highly motivated by the event, which had been developed as a result of the good working relationships between the legal staff of the college and the local law society.

21. Teachers drew effectively on students' own experience of work to illustrate theory. The survey also found good examples of local business people contributing to students' learning by discussing their experiences and providing feedback to students on their work.

22.

**Imaginative use of a local employer to develop students' understanding of business**

Students studying GCE applied business completed a range of assignments which involved visits to and research with local small and medium sized enterprises. The students had to identify a company and negotiate with its managers to agree a suitable research project. Students showed a good understanding of business resources by analysing the ways in which their chosen organisation's resources might be deployed more effectively. One student had worked with a local restaurant, recording and analysing the fluctuations in demand. The data were used to devise a more efficient arrangement for employing staff, based on well presented analysis. Students developed their relationships with their chosen organisation and used them to complete further assignments. Critical to the success of this arrangement was the teacher's thorough briefing of students who could explain how most organisations, however small, could benefit from an objective analysis of their current practices.

23. The owner of a local coffee shop came to talk to the A-level business group in one college about her experience of setting up the business; this was to be followed with a progress report one year later. Several colleges had used local business people successfully to review students' business proposals, using the approach from a popular television series. Overall, however, there was not enough direct involvement of businesses in teaching academic courses.
24. Teachers used PowerPoint effectively to present information and often made links to relevant websites and topical issues, although the colleges visited did not always exploit in full the potential of information learning technology to promote students' independent learning. The teachers who spoke to inspectors during the survey were very keen to extend students' information technology skills, recognising that developing them would be critical for students' effectiveness in the business world.
25. Progress in using information learning technology to support learning was occasionally hindered by insufficient computers for the size of the group, a lack of data projectors or interactive whiteboards in classrooms, or problems with a college's intranet. Despite these problems, however, several lessons seen during the survey required students to use the Internet for research and presenting ideas, as in the following examples. They show information and communication technology being used imaginatively for research and presentation.

### **Imaginative use of information learning technology for research and presentation**

A BTEC National Diploma lesson gave students the opportunity to use the Internet to research information for their assignment and develop their communication and information technology skills. Students were working on their marketing assignment to create a suitable and realistic website for their chosen organisation. Students made good progress in understanding what makes a good website to promote a company, developing their information technology skills in using industry standard software to produce a website and their independent research skills. The level of complexity expected of the website was matched well to students' expertise and prior information technology skills.

In an A-level accounting lesson, focused on key business concepts and formula application, the teacher used a spreadsheet projected onto a screen from a laptop computer to facilitate students' calculation of share ratios from a trading and profit and loss account. A 'hide and reveal' function was used to:

- show the formulae required for the calculations
- show the data in the account that were needed for the calculations
- reveal the correct answers once students had done the calculations
- question the students on the effect on the ratio calculations and the trading and profit and loss account of changing some variables: 'what if?'

Students' understanding and application of the formulae and the concepts underpinning them were extremely well developed and, by using this method, the teacher could carefully check individual students' levels of understanding.

26. All the colleges surveyed had developed intranet sites to varying degrees. In the main, they held useful information about course organisation, content and assessment; many had notes from lessons and PowerPoint presentations. A wide range of good links to relevant websites was available for research work and to develop students' wider understanding of and enthusiasm for business. Intranets which had been developed further included interactive learning sections which students enjoyed using. They were able to post links to articles which had interested them or to additional learning resources which they had discovered. This helped to promote the essential independent learning and research skills for sixth form study, using a medium which was familiar to them and exciting.

### **The use of an intranet to effectively promote learning**

The business and economics department in a sixth form college used a fully interactive site of e-based learning resources. This included online text books, links to websites, student 'test yourself' questions with instant feedback, quizzes and a particularly innovative chat room known as 'ask the teacher'. The latter provided useful extra support for students. They emailed their homework to the teacher and received prompt, informative and detailed feedback. The site contained a log of students' marks for their written work to enable them and their teacher to monitor their performance closely. Teachers had used the site to set extension work and stimulate topical debates. Students were very positive about the resource. One commented, 'Without the online discussions I had with the teacher and other students in my class, I do not think I would have been successful in my university interview.' The site was used well in lessons and by students for independent study, particularly for revision.

27. In the lessons which were satisfactory rather than good, the teachers had not developed ways of motivating students and helping them to enjoy their work sufficiently, so they found the subject mundane. In such lessons, the discussions were heavily teacher-led and students did not have sufficient opportunities to become engaged fully in question and answer sessions. Commonly, the teacher was too eager to give students the answers to business problems rather than allow them to think them through for themselves. For example, in an accounting lesson, the teacher occasionally revealed the answers on the board before some of the students had time to complete the task. This caused confusion and a few students did not understand how to complete the required calculations or how the answers related to the profit and loss account.

### **Key skills**

28. In most of the 23 colleges visited, opportunities to develop the key skills of numeracy, communication and information and communication technology had been matched with schemes of work. However, teachers did not always make the most of these opportunities to ensure that students made progress in these disciplines and achieved the appropriate qualifications. In one college, students' achievement in developing key skills had improved significantly with the appointment of a key skills coordinator in the business department, who monitored their progress closely. They were encouraged to take online assessments when they had reached the required standard and portfolio evidence was gathered systematically.

### **Assessment, target-setting and student support**

29. Assessment, monitoring and the setting of targets were outstanding in nine of the colleges visited and good in almost all the others. In all the colleges,

teachers set students regular tasks to monitor their progress closely. Vocational courses had a clear, comprehensive calendar of assessment activities and deadlines for assignments. Staff had developed a range of central recording systems to manage the process; these provided effective opportunities for students to receive preliminary feedback on the quality of their assignments and to resubmit work when they had improved it. Regular, written homework was set on academic courses, often based on examination-style questions, in order to develop the skills of application, analysis and evaluation. Teachers had a good understanding of the examination requirements and used this well to help students to develop high grade answers to GCE AS and A2 questions.

30. A key factor in students' success in the colleges surveyed was the emphasis on their understanding of their target grades and their progress towards them. In all the colleges, students had been set a minimum target grade based on their prior attainment. They could therefore monitor their progress against their targets. Students usually met their teacher individually at least every term to discuss their progress in detail.
31. Students who understood the monitoring process well appreciated the impact it had on improving their performance and they became more responsible for their own learning. In one college, the tutorial and monitoring system had been linked effectively to a human resources assignment on measuring and monitoring performance. Students commented that this had helped them to produce better quality business assignments; they wrote much sharper personal targets and self-assessment checklists as a result. Another college had developed an aide memoire to support the process of setting challenging targets for students and helping them to achieve them. In addition to quantitative data such as attendance rates and homework marks for each student, the electronic monitoring system listed a menu of standard targets. Tutors selected the most appropriate targets for their students or produced their own. All staff had access to the system and students could see their own records, which enabled them to monitor their own progress. The process had greatly improved the consistency of setting targets and ensured prompt action when students were falling behind in their work.

#### **Effective target setting in a GCE A-level applied business course**

The college had developed a good system for ensuring that students set targets frequently and had their progress reviewed each week. During the weekly progress tutorial, students completed an action plan for the following week. Actions had to be very specific rather than general phrases such as 'complete the unit'. Tutors checked the action plans during each lesson and kept records of progress. Students were very well aware of what they needed to do each week, both in lessons and while working independently. Tutors gave clear feedback on the progress they were making and indicated the likely outcome of the assignment, based



on the work the student had done at that stage. At the end of each unit, students had to answer structured questions which required them to reflect on their performance and to set realistic future targets.

32. Teachers' feedback on written work was thorough and, in almost all the colleges, gave students clear guidance on what they needed to do to improve. Innovative and creative assessment methods supported students in achieving their learning goals. In one college, for example, the staff provided on-site assessments to fit in with an employer's shift patterns.

### **Using non-written assessments to raise achievements**

For adult students on management courses, the college had developed a very good range of opportunities for assessment, using professional discussion and digital recording. This supported more time efficient evidence gathering and more interactive assessment of knowledge and skills. A log was produced that indicated where on a CD the evidence could be found so that it could be accessed easily for assessment and verification. Recording and completing assessments in this way supported students who found report writing a barrier to achievement. The college gave inspectors examples of students who had achieved a qualification for the first time in their life.

33. Support for students, both in and outside lessons, was a major strength in the colleges visited. Teachers often shared a work room where all the business staff were easily accessible; students did not need to wait to get help from their own teacher. In general, students' progress was monitored very closely. They particularly valued the regular one to one discussions with their teacher to review progress and consider ways to improve their work.
34. The pastoral and academic review processes were rigorous and, in most of the colleges visited, teachers monitored students' progress regularly across all aspects of their college experience. The processes were effective in identifying students' individual needs and providing appropriate, focused support, such as personal skills development and workshops for students who were underperforming or who could be challenged more. Many of the colleges visited had a sophisticated early warning system for students identified as at risk of dropping out or not achieving their targets. Large numbers of students of different abilities took advantage of such extra support and often improved their performance.
35. In one college, additional support had been renamed 'personal skills development', with the result that there was no stigma attached to the provision. The extra lessons were timetabled as part of the students' programmes. They took place in the business learning resource centre and were taught by qualified support staff who had a good understanding of the content of the business courses, the skills that students needed and the

assessment methods. Business and support staff worked closely together to monitor the impact of what was provided. Attendance at learning support was a condition of students' learning agreements and had contributed markedly to improved achievement. In another college, timetabling academic support lessons and homework clubs had helped students keep on track. They were requested to attend or could ask to do so: attendance was very good.

36. Lessons were supplemented by revision sessions, which included preparation for resit examinations, often after college or during the holidays. In approximately half of the colleges visited, students could email their tutor with queries about their work. Students found this support valuable and commented that they often had responses from their teacher in the evenings and at weekends when they needed it most.
37. Some colleges also organised peer mentoring schemes.

#### **Effective peer mentoring schemes to support students' achievements**

A-level students in a sixth form college volunteered to mentor AS students. Student mentors were given training on aspects such as confidentiality, when to pass concerns to a teacher and mentoring skills. They provided support mostly for subject-specific issues but, occasionally, included more personal support. The mentor sessions were organised at lunchtimes when teachers were also on hand. Students commented that they sometimes met their mentor more frequently and also contacted them using the college email system. Students were carefully matched to a mentor who could provide them with the best support. As well as students who were experiencing difficulties, mentees included high attaining students who wanted to extend their understanding. Students were very positive about the initiative and the overwhelming majority of mentees continued to maintain contact with their mentors throughout the academic year. Mentees found that having things explained in different ways was helpful. Mentors felt they benefited: explaining concepts and ideas to mentees supported their own understanding, as well as their revision when they were resitting exams. It also helped to develop skills they could refer to on their university application forms or when seeking employment.

### **Resources for learning**

38. Resources to support teaching and learning were produced to a high professional standard and students were expected to produce work of the same high quality. Effective course handbooks for students on GCE AS and A2 courses contained a good mixture of notes to support learning, exemplar answers and case studies, and detailed guidance on succeeding in examinations

and coursework. Students on vocational courses received helpful written guidance, often backed up by online support materials and useful websites.

39. In many of the colleges visited, an extensive range of extra-curricular activities enriched learning, promoted students' wider interest in business, and developed their enterprise skills and economic well-being. Most colleges in the survey had arranged for students to visit local businesses and attend higher education conferences.

#### **Links with the local university to raise aspiration and achievement**

One college had developed particularly effective links with one of the leading university business schools. Around 60 business and economics students attended masterclasses at the university which proved to be very motivational. Two undergraduate students of marketing were appointed as mentors to GCE and BTEC National students. The mentors received training from the college staff, were familiar with the schemes of work, contributed very positively to lessons and were highly regarded as role models by the college students.

40. Many students also made visits abroad, including to New York, Sweden, Brussels, Paris and Barcelona. Students in one sixth form college explained how their trip to Disneyland in Paris had developed their understanding of marketing and finance units, as well as the importance of protecting and developing corporate and brand identity.
41. In four of the colleges visited, students had established a thriving economics and business studies or law society with their teachers' support. The activities arranged by students included topical debates, visiting speakers and an annual dinner. Students valued this extra dimension to their course which allowed them to organise events of interest independently and make better informed choices about their future.

#### **The development of a business academy to provide an outstanding and coherent enrichment programme**

All students on any of the college's business courses were encouraged to sign up for the business academy. For one afternoon a week they took part in an extensive range of relevant activities, including listening to speakers from industry and higher education, debates, problem solving, team building and a business related competition in the style of a popular television programme. The activities, developed with the college's Centre of Vocational Excellence in leadership, focused strongly on developing students' presentation and leadership skills. All students enjoyed participating in the academy and gained accreditation through the Institute of Leadership and Management Award.

42. Many of the further education colleges in the survey had formed good external links with local businesses to provide a range of professional courses and some bespoke training to meet employers' needs. A good range of flexible training packages was available to support local businesses; many had flexible assessment arrangements. One college had developed a good mix of college-based and distance learning provision to offer a successful, high quality marketing course.
43. Generally, however, teachers did not use local businesses sufficiently to provide students with first-hand experience of what they were being taught. In most of the colleges surveyed, work experience was not a structured part of full-time programmes. Even so, the survey found examples of imaginative timetabling to facilitate students' experience of work. One college constructed timetables so that students attended college for three days a week and almost all of them had a part-time job. Business studies teachers used the students' experience at work well in class and in assignments.

#### **Work experience to develop students' practical business administration skills**

The business administration department ran its own business centre which provided students with supervised practical experience. Most of the work came from within the college, but there was a small amount of externally commissioned work. After initial training, students carried out a good range of duties including the reception desk, preparing job sheets and allocating tasks. During the survey visit, students were helping to run a careers convention at the college, as well as undertaking routine administration tasks. Students found that the practical experience gained from working in the business centre increased their skills and confidence in preparation for their one day a week work experience in a local business. College students helped to supervise the pupils from local schools who attended the college for a business administration course. This provided opportunities for them to show how they could assume responsibility.

### **Leadership and management**

44. Leadership and management were very good in the colleges surveyed. The staff worked in a self-critical culture of continuous improvement with very thorough self-assessment. Curriculum managers often encouraged teachers to take risks and be innovative in their approaches to delivering courses. Staff in the business teams worked well together. Teachers were knowledgeable and their enthusiasm often motivated students to do well. Detailed and informative analysis of examination performance was used well to improve the provision. Systems for lesson observation were generally robust. In several of the colleges visited, staff were encouraged to observe teaching outside the business subject area to see specific examples of good practice, although not enough

opportunities were taken to share good practice. Action plans set clear and challenging targets and were monitored closely by managers. Feedback from students and, where appropriate, employers, was sought and acted upon.

45. In most of the colleges surveyed, the head of department was enthusiastic, energetic, professional and committed to the students' success. Quality of provision and high standards were integral parts of the departments' working culture, and were reflected in expectations of punctuality, attendance, the quality of the learning materials and the quality of work that students were expected to produce. The high standards set and the expectations of students to do well provided a very positive and professional learning environment.
46. The colleges surveyed emphasised staff development well, with a strong focus on teaching and learning. Staff were encouraged to attend courses to keep themselves up to date with developments in their subject. In general further education colleges, the teacher training provision was an important source of support for part-time teachers who had joined the college from business backgrounds and had no formal teaching qualifications. However, in a few of the 23 colleges visited, there were insufficient opportunities for staff to update their professional skills and gain industrial experience. During the survey, managers often noted that good professional development had been instrumental in recruiting and retaining high quality staff; keeping their knowledge up to date was a major factor in achieving high standards.

## Notes

The survey was conducted between September 2006 and March 2007. A sample of 23 colleges was selected from colleges where provision in business had been judged to be outstanding or good at the most recent inspection. The visits were conducted by three of Her Majesty's Inspectors, an Additional Inspector and two inspectors from the Adult Learning Inspectorate. Inspectors observed 122 lessons; held meetings with students, teachers and managers; scrutinised policies, schemes of work and self-assessment reports; and reviewed examples of students' written work.

## Useful websites

The Department for Children, Schools and Families provides links to a range of learning resources useful in the teaching of business courses at Key Stage 4 and post-16: [www.teachernet.gov.uk/teachingandlearning/resourcematerials](http://www.teachernet.gov.uk/teachingandlearning/resourcematerials)

The British Educational Communications and Technology Agency (Becta). This site provides useful e-learning resources and links to alternative sites to access further digital and interactive technology materials for use by teachers in teaching business courses: [www.becta.org.uk/](http://www.becta.org.uk/)

The Qualification and Curriculum Authority. The business education section of QCA contains details on the wide range of qualifications in the subject and useful links to relevant awarding body websites: [www.qca.org.uk/qca\\_4610.aspx](http://www.qca.org.uk/qca_4610.aspx)

The Quality Improvement Agency's website has useful information on innovation and excellence in the post-16 learning and skills sector: [www.qia.org.uk](http://www.qia.org.uk)

The Quality Improvement Agency (QIA) excellence gateway is for post-16 learning and skills providers. It is the new home for Excalibur.<sup>1</sup> Here you will find examples of good practice, self-improvement, suppliers of improvement services plus materials to support teaching and learning including land-based subjects:

- <http://excellence.qia.org.uk>
- Excalibur Good Practice Database:  
<http://excellence.qia.org.uk/goodpracticedatabase>

The Economics and Business Education Association is a non-profit making organisation that provides support to teachers of business studies:  
[www.ebea.org.uk/ebea](http://www.ebea.org.uk/ebea)

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<sup>1</sup> Excalibur is now called the Good Practice Database.

Biz/ed is a web based learning and teaching education resource for teachers and students of business courses. It includes resources, news updates, interactive questions and competitions: [www.bized.co.uk/](http://www.bized.co.uk/)

## Colleges participating in the survey

Abingdon and Witney College, Oxfordshire  
Bridgwater College, Somerset  
Brockenhurst College, Hampshire  
Carmel College, St Helens Merseyside  
City & Islington College, London  
Dewsbury College, West Yorkshire  
Farnham College, Surrey  
Godalming Sixth Form College, Surrey  
Halesowen College, West Midlands  
Hills Road Sixth Form College, Cambridge  
John Leggott Sixth Form College, Scunthorpe  
Joseph Chamberlain Sixth Form College, Birmingham  
Loughborough College, Leicestershire  
North Warwickshire & Hinckley College, Nuneaton  
Peterborough Regional College, Cambridgeshire  
Queen Elizabeth Sixth Form College, Darlington  
Runshaw College, Leyland, Lancashire  
Shrewsbury College, Shropshire  
South Birmingham College, West Midlands  
South Cheshire College, Crewe  
South Downs College, Hampshire  
South Trafford College, Altrincham  
Truro College, Cornwall.