

Alexandra House
33 Kingsway
London
WC2B 6SE

T 08456 404045
F 020 7421 6644
www.ofsted.gov.uk



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Mr Greg Molan
Principal
Shrewsbury College of Arts and Technology
London Road
Shrewsbury
SY2 6PR

Dear Mr Molan

Ofsted Subject and Survey Inspection Programme 2006-07

Sector Subject Area 15 - Business, Administration and Law

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation during my visit on 20 and 21 November. I am particularly grateful to your staff for all their hard work in preparing the programme and background documentation and giving up a great deal of their time during the visit. Please pass on my thanks to learners who gave up their time to talk to me.

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

The evidence used to inform judgements included: interviews with staff and learners, scrutiny of relevant documentation, analysis of learners' work and observation of five lessons.

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

Good practice observed

- Several teachers are adept at encouraging student to relate their current work experience to the theory taught in lessons. This was particularly the case on the TUC and ACCA courses.
- There is skilful use in some classes of Power Point as a vehicle for promoting discussion and interaction between students rather than solely as a presentational tool. It is particularly effective, for example on TUC courses, where it is used in combination with high quality stimulus material and a variety of student activities to promote learning.

- The enrichment offered to legal executive students whereby they visit the local Crown Court and subsequently use the facilities, together with a serving judge, to undertake simulated court proceedings based on anonymised cases, helps to motivate the students and encourage them to succeed.
- Support for full time students is good. They receive regular reviews of their progress and opportunities to reflect on how they can further improve their performance. However, arrangements to track students progress against their prior attainment are at an early stage of development.
- Course reviews feed into self assessment reports which are subject to validation by a college panel. Courses which underperform are placed into "special measures" and action is targeted to ensure that improvements are made.
- Students get helpful feedback on their assignments. However, in a minority of cases where reliance is placed on periodic major assignments, students do not receive feedback on their progress early enough in the course.

Areas for development

- College data shows that progress has been made in 2006 to address the significant underperformance of some students in the previous year. However, the data for the subject area as a whole is not significantly above national averages and suggests scope for further improvement in students' achievement.
- There has been a decline in enrolments to several courses, notably full time business programmes. Where, for example on the Diploma in Administration, courses at different levels run with merged groups, this provides particular challenges for the staff and learners concerned.
- Although initiatives have been taken to promote links with local employers, particularly in the legal area and through the workforce development unit, there is no coherent strategy in place across the subject area.
- Part time students appreciate the advice they get from tutors but there is no structured entitlement to regular progress reviews or tutorial arrangements.
- Whilst most teaching is satisfactory and some is good, there are too few arrangements to identify and share good practice to eliminate underperformance.
- The use of ICT in the programme area is underdeveloped, not only to enhance teaching but also to provide direct access for students to course materials and guidance.
- With the exception of the TUC courses, arrangements to promote race or gender equality are not high profile in the subject area.

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

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

Yours sincerely

Rhys Evans
Additional Inspector