

Alexandra House
33 Kingsway
London
WC2B 6SE

T 08456 404045
F 020 7421 6855
www.ofsted.gov.uk



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Mr Michael Oakes
Principal
South Downs College
College Road
Waterlooville
Hampshire
PO7 8AA

Dear Mr Oakes

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 30 and 31 January. 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 seven 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

- High achievements have been maintained over the last three years. In particular, success rates in A-level law, NVQ accounting level 2, BTEC national and BTEC first in business are outstanding.
- High standards of learners' work, both their written work and their practical performance, in work placements and external competitions demonstrate a good understanding of business topics.

- There is good development of research skills through the use of on-line materials on the college intranet.
- Teaching and learning are consistently good, and some outstanding. Lessons are all well planned and managed, with a good pace being maintained, and activities being varied to meet the interests and different learning styles of students. Teachers make lessons relevant and meaningful for learners by referring to their own, and their students' industry experiences.
- Assessment front-sheets are well constructed and help teachers provide constructive clear and detailed comments for learners to help them improve the quality of their written work.
- The range of courses is well suited to the local area and adapted in response to identified needs and good links with local employers. The availability of a wide range of professional courses, including the new certificate in finance is appreciated by learners.
- Learners' individual learning plans are clear with meaningful targets which are closely monitored. Learners receive detailed and accurate advice and guidance at the beginning of their courses, so they are clear about what to expect. Learners with additional needs are well and unobtrusively supported, both in the classroom and in the resource centre. More able learners appreciate the particularly good support for their UCAS applications, and you are raising the aspirations of students. Learners appreciate, and benefit from, the enrichment activities of visits, external speakers, and external competitions.
- The department is well led and managed. Teachers are experienced, confident, work well as a team, and are benefiting from the new mentoring system. Learners benefit from good staff expertise, their recent and credible industrial experience and the knowledge of some staff who are part-time examiners. Resources are particularly good, and learners appreciate the attractive learning environment and up to date equipment.

Areas for development, which we discussed, included:

- continue to apply the strategies to improve the success and retention of learners on the NVQ in customer service course
- continue to implement the ILT strategy, so that more classes can benefit from the use of interactive whiteboards
- ensure that teaching materials are not gender biased, particularly where you have an unequal gender split in classes
- continue to maintain the quality of your provision, as learner numbers increase on your most popular courses.

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

Jane Shaw
Adult Learning Inspector