

Alexandra House
33 Kingsway
London
WC2B 6SE

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



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Mr Jonathan Burnett OBE
Principal
Truro College
College Road
Truro
Cornwall
TR1 3XX

Dear Mr Burnett

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 our visit on 26 and 27 February 2007. We are 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 our thanks to those learners who gave up their time to talk to us.

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

- Success rates in business courses for learners aged 16-18 are well above the national average for similar colleges.
- Success rates and high grade achievement are mostly well above the national average in general certificate of education (GCE) AS and A level business courses for learners aged 16-18.
- Target setting and individual review for learners are extremely effective; learners make at least the progress they should from their starting points on entry in AS and A level qualifications. In accounting at both AS and A level in 2005/06 students made excellent progress.

- The application of the recognition and recording of progress and achievement (RARPA) for adult learners in non-accredited training is rigorous.
- Success rates on private secretaries' courses are very high.
- Systems to monitor and follow up on non-attendance are very effective and have contributed to improved retention rates.
- Lessons are generally of a high quality. They are well planned with clear objectives that are understood by learners. Teachers use questioning techniques very well in lessons to test and develop students' knowledge and understanding. Teachers use a range of interesting activities to meet the individual needs of learners. Activities draw from realistic business contexts including students' work placements.
- Teachers have expert subject knowledge. Staff development is effective in supporting the sharing of good practice in teaching and learning. The use of learners' feedback in the evaluation and continuous improvement of lessons is rigorous.
- Teachers have very good rapport with learners and provide positive and supportive feedback on performance in lessons. Learners state that teachers go out of their way to support learners' needs and they want them to succeed.
- Teachers' marking is very thorough. Feedback on learners' work is of consistently high quality; this leaves learners in no doubt about how well they have done against the criteria and where improvement is needed.
- The requirements of the communication key skill are well embedded in AS and A-level economics.
- Learners use information and communication technology (ICT) confidently and well to develop and support research and independent learning skills. These skills equip them very well for their current studies and progression into higher education (HE) and future employment.
- Learners' progression into HE and business-related degrees is strong.
- There is a broad-based range of courses with clear progression routes. Learners may choose from a very extensive range of subject combinations at AS and A level.
- There is an impressive range of courses on offer to learners in employment through the Business Centre, and the centre of vocational excellence (CoVE) in care. The college is very effective at engaging local employers and in identifying and meeting their training needs. It is extremely responsive to the needs of local businesses and provides flexible and creatively designed training packages. Partnership working is very effective. Assessment is very flexible to learners' needs, including good use of ICT and professional discussion.
- Teachers and managers embrace a culture of continuous improvement. The monitoring of college performance is highly effective in identifying areas for improvement. The resulting actions are equally effective, as is clear from the successful focus on raising

framework achievement in work-based learning. Teachers and managers genuinely place learners at the centre of the college's activities. Communication between teaching staff in support of learners is very strong.

Areas for development:

- maintain the overall improving trend in retention and success rates in long business courses for adults
- maintain the overall improving trend in framework achievement for apprenticeships.

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

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Russell Jordan', written in a cursive style.

Russell Jordan
Her Majesty's Inspector