

Providing Inspection Services for

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EVALUATING BUSINESS EDUCATION

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INTRODUCTION

The 1994 Inspectorate report on the Environment and Society Area of Study (AOS) identified some of the key issues facing business education in schools with the introduction of the Northern Ireland curriculum. This paper builds upon the findings of the earlier report using the format adopted in the Inspectorate publication 'Evaluating Schools' (DENI 1992, revised 1998).

Since the introduction of the Northern Ireland Curriculum, there has been a significant growth in the number of pupils taking business education subjects at key stage 4 and post 16. Two of the subjects, business studies and economics, are contributory subjects within the AOS framework of the statutory curriculum at key stage 4. While the other business education subjects are not part of the statutory curriculum at key stage 4, they are offered by some schools as optional subjects. A small number of schools offer accounting at key stage 4 or post 16. The main secretarial subject is GCSE office applications which is offered by a significant minority of schools and a small number offer single subject examinations in word-processing.



1. Ethos

The ethos of the business education department can be seen to contribute effectively to the full development of all the pupils who study business education subjects when:

- A.
- i. there are good relationships between the pupils and teachers in class and in activities, related to business education, outside the classroom, such as mini-enterprise;
 - ii. the teachers who work in the business education department identify with it; they feel valued, relationships among them are good and they work well together in a constructively self-critical manner;
 - iii. the pupils are highly motivated, work well as members of a team and take a pride in their work, they recognise the importance of high standards of presentation, including the use of information and communication technology (ICT);
 - iv. the pupils achieve realistically high levels of success in business education coursework and external examinations; accordingly, they and their teachers are encouraged in their efforts and expectations;
 - v. the classrooms are attractive and there are displays of pupils' work in business education as well as relevant commercially-produced material, including newspaper articles.



The school's ethos can be seen not to contribute sufficiently to the general development of all pupils when:

- B.
 - i. the teachers do not identify with the business education department and show little commitment to take forward the aims of the school; there is little co-operation amongst the teachers;
 - ii. relationships between pupils and teachers are strained and there is little contact outside normal classroom activities;
 - iii. the pupils have little enthusiasm for the subject and show a lack of pride in their work;
 - iv. the teachers' expectations are unrealistic and levels of success in examinations are low;
 - v. the business studies classrooms are dull and unattractive, devoid of displays of the pupils' work or relevant commercially-produced materials.



2. Quality of Teaching and Learning

Teaching and learning are at the heart of a school's work. The relationship between teaching and learning is complex but the quality of the teaching bears directly on the effectiveness of learning.

The following sections highlight important aspects of teaching and learning in business education:

- relationships;
- pupils' responses;
- teaching;
- the assessment of pupils' work; and
- planning.

It is possible that all the characteristics of high quality outlined in some of these sections will be present in a single business education lesson; it is more likely that they will be observed over a number of lessons and in a variety of classes; equally, shortcomings identified below may be present in a single lesson, or may be observed over a sequence of lessons in a variety of classes.

2.1 Relationships

Relationships can be considered good when:

- A.
 - i. the pupils work well with their teachers in an atmosphere of mutual respect and good humoured co- operation;
 - ii. the pupils are encouraged to value one another and express their own views about important business issues and concepts;
 - iii. the pupils respond well in lessons;
 - iv. the pupils' self-confidence and self-esteem are enhanced by the nature of the teachers' response to their work in business education.



Relationships can be considered not good enough when:

- B.
- i. relationships between the pupils and the teachers are strained or excessively relaxed;
 - ii. the pupils are not encouraged to value one another; they are passive or disruptive in class;
 - iii. the pupils are diffident;
 - iv. the teachers rarely give praise; they do not encourage the pupils to express their views about important business issues and concepts, and make little effort to promote the pupils' self-reliance and independence.



2.2 Pupils' Responses

Responses can be considered good when the pupils:

A.

In Business Studies and Economics

- i. show initiative and can work independently and in co-operation with others;
- ii. gather and use information effectively from a wide range of sources;
- iii. talk with confidence about what they are doing and apply their knowledge in a wide range of contexts, distinguishing between facts and opinions and evaluating data in order to make informed choices;
- iv. understand the language, concepts, techniques and decision-making procedures involved in business studies or economics;
- v. are well informed of the nature and significance of innovation and change and have a good knowledge of what is happening in their local area;

In Secretarial Studies

- i. understand the content and relevance of the text which they are keyboarding and produce work which is well presented;
- ii. compose directly to the computer; edit and proof-read their composition;
- iii. in office applications, they have a secure and practical understanding of business administration, including the ergonomics of office design.



Responses can be considered not good enough when the pupils:

B.

In Business Studies and Economics

- i. do not achieve the standards of which they are capable; they display little readiness or ability to collaborate with others or to pursue their learning independently of the teacher;
- ii. are not discriminating or selective in their use of data; they copy material directly from textbooks, CD-ROMS and the Internet for coursework, essays and other written work;
- iii. are insecure in their knowledge and understanding; their tasks are frequently unfinished and the general presentation of their work is poor;
- iv. have insufficient understanding of the language, concepts, techniques and decision-making procedures in business studies or economics;
- v. have an insecure understanding of the nature and significance of innovation and change and have little knowledge of business trends in their area;

In Secretarial Studies

- i. make frequent mistakes, do not proof-read their work and often find the language of the text they are required to process to be too difficult; weaknesses in spelling and punctuation contribute to the low achievement in examinations;
- ii. are unable to compose at the computer, or when they compose, they do not refine their work through editing and proof-reading;
- iii. in office applications, they have a superficial understanding of modern practice in business administration.



2.3 Teaching Approaches

Teaching approaches can be considered to be fit for their purpose when:

A.

In Business Studies and Economics

- i. the teachers do not confine themselves to any single approach but use methods which are suitable for the situation including exposition, ICT, role play, and case studies which focus on the local business environment; they provide the pupils with experience in entrepreneurial activity such as mini enterprise and in first-hand research;
- ii. the teachers' expectations are realistically high, and the pupils understand what is expected of them; their knowledge, understanding and skills in business studies or economics are developed through challenging activities which require them to think as well as to do;
- iii. the teachers ensure that classwork is purposeful; the pupils feel that their oral, practical, graphical and written contributions are valued;
- iv. the teachers motivate and stimulate pupils' interest in business studies or economics; they relate concepts and theories to the experiences of the pupils;
- v. the teachers use current issues to supplement theory and concepts, such as newspapers, journals, government publications and ICT;

In Secretarial Studies

- i. opportunities are given for composition and the critical evaluation of work; the teaching goes well beyond drill and copying of material;
- ii. appropriate stress is laid on communication and opportunities are provided to develop the pupils' language skills by encouraging composition and editing at the computer;
- iii. in office applications, effective use is made of industrial visits to give the pupils a good understanding of current practice in business administration.



Teaching approaches can be considered to lack fitness for purpose when:

B.

In Business Studies and Economics

- i. the teaching methods are narrow; insufficient use is made approaches such as case studies, group work or mini enterprise;
- ii. the teachers' expectations are not high enough or have not been understood by the pupils; the teachers offer undemanding tasks which result in routine and unimaginative responses; there is an over-reliance on activities which require the pupils to read textbooks and to complete worksheets;
- iii. the classwork is poorly organised and insufficient value is placed on the oral, practical, graphical and written contributions of the pupils; the pupils are constrained in their responses and are not encouraged to answer in depth;
- iv. the content of the lessons is too abstract; little effort is made to relate concepts and theories to the experiences and interests of the pupils;
- v. pupils have too few opportunities to apply their understanding to current issues and trends in business and the economy; little use is made of newspapers, journals, government publications and ICT;

In Secretarial Studies

- i. word-processing is undertaken as a mechanical task without reference to the development of the pupils' communication skills; the teaching is confined largely to drill and copying of material;
- ii. the pupils are not encouraged to develop the skill of composing or editing work directly at the computer;
- iii. there are too few opportunities for pupils in office applications to gain a practical understanding of modern practice in business administration.



2.4 The Teachers' Assessment of Pupils' Work

The teachers' assessment of the pupils' work can be considered effective when:

- A.
 - i. assessment is an integral part of teaching and learning in business education subjects; the teachers monitor regularly the extent to which the pupils understand business concepts and how they are applied in the world of business; the teaching approaches are amended in the light of this information;
 - ii. the teachers make use of assessment information to consolidate the pupils' learning across the elements of business education; they use a range of suitable assessment methods, such as written exercises, oral presentations, research and group work; the pupils are encouraged to undertake self and peer assessment, the outcomes of which are valued by the teachers;
 - iii. the pupils' work is regularly and consistently marked with detailed evaluative comments which enable the pupils to identify their strengths and weaknesses and provide them with guidance for further improvement;
 - iv. records of assessment are detailed and show the progress of pupils in each element of business education.

2.5 Planning

Planning can be considered effective when:

- A.
 - i. there are clear and realistic objectives within a broad, balanced and integrated programme which is set within the framework of the programme of study for business studies or economics in the Northern Ireland Curriculum; account is taken of the contribution of business education subjects to the development of the educational themes and key skills through specifically identified content and learning tasks;
 - ii. the teacher takes account of the range of abilities among the pupils when choosing methods and selecting activities to ensure that all pupils experience challenge and a measure of success;
 - iii. the learning objectives are clear in terms of what the pupils should know, understand or be able to do at the end of each lesson, term or year;
 - iv. appropriate emphasis is given to the development of the pupils' literacy skills and the contribution that business education makes to the development of these skills;
 - v. the teacher offers the pupils good opportunities to develop their ICT skills.



The teachers' assessment of the pupils' work can be considered not effective enough when:

- B.
 - i. assessment is seen as an end in itself, is largely summative and is not used to modify future teaching methods and to improve learning;
 - ii. a limited range of assessment techniques is used and little use is made of the pupils' self and peer assessment;
 - iii. the pupils' work in business education subjects is marked irregularly with few evaluative comments; weaknesses are not identified by the teacher; little guidance is provided to encourage them to improve;
 - iv. records of assessment provide insufficient detail about the progress of the pupils across the elements in business education.

Planning can be considered not sufficiently effective when:

- B.
 - i. the long-term planning does not ensure a broad and balanced and integrated programme within the framework of the programme of study for business studies or economics; insufficient account is given to the educational themes;
 - ii. account is not taken of the full ability range of the pupils; there is little use of strategies such as role play or mini-enterprise to motivate and challenge all pupils to achieve success in each lesson; the quality of links with the local business community is poor;
 - iii. the learning objectives are not sufficiently clear in terms of what the pupils should know, understand or be able to do at the end of each lesson, term or year;
 - iv. insufficient attention is given to the contribution that business education subjects can make to the development of the pupils' oral and written skills;
 - v. insufficient recognition is given to the need to develop and use a range of ICT applications.



3. MANAGEMENT ARRANGEMENTS

Teaching and learning in business education are supported and enhanced by efficient and effective management arrangements. These are ultimately the responsibility of the principal, in collaboration with the Board of Governors. In secondary schools the head of the business education department has an important role to play through the leadership and management he/she provides.

At their best these arrangements ensure that the contribution of each teacher of business education is valued, that relationships among staff are harmonious and that morale is high. Further, all pupils gain optimum benefit from the range of resources for business education, human and material, available to the school. The following sections highlight a number of features which indicate the quality of the management arrangements for business education.

3.1 The School's Evaluation of Teaching and Learning

The evaluation of teaching and learning can be considered good when the head of department ensures that:

- A.
 - i. the departmental policy on monitoring, assessment and reporting on pupils' progress complements the whole-school policy, and information about examination results is used to inform the evaluation;
 - ii. there is a shared responsibility for curriculum development within the business education department.



The evaluation of teaching and learning can be considered not good enough when the head of department:

- B.
 - i. does not implement the departmental and whole-school policy on the monitoring, assessment and reporting on pupils' progress; and does not use information about examination results to inform the evaluation;
 - ii. does not take the lead or involve colleagues in curriculum development issues in the department.



3.2 Staff Deployment and Development

Staff deployment and the arrangements for staff development can be considered good when:

- A.
 - i. all members of the department are suitably qualified and have recent and relevant industrial experience and/or strong links with industry; they are up-to-date with current issues in business;
 - ii. the teachers are competent and confident in the use of a wide range of ICT software applications;
 - iii. the teachers are flexible and teach a range of business education subjects;
 - iv. the head of business studies is an effective leader, values and supports the other business education staff and encourages a departmental identity;
 - v. attendance at INSET is monitored and evaluated to ensure that it meets the needs of the teachers as well as the school;
 - vi. there is sufficient technical expertise to maintain and service ICT equipment.

3.3 Organisation of the Curriculum

The organisation of the curriculum in business education can be considered good when:

- A.
 - i. it sits within a broad and balanced curriculum and business education subjects have a suitable allocation of time;
 - ii. the pupils take only one business education subject at key stage 4; accounting is only available at GCE level.



Staff deployment and the arrangements for staff development can be considered not good enough when:

- B.
- i. not all members of the department have relevant qualifications or recent and relevant industrial experience and/or strong links with industry; staff do not keep up-to-date with current issues in business;
 - ii. the teachers lack confidence in the use of ICT in teaching and learning;
 - iii. the teachers are inflexible and are able to teach only one business education subject;
 - iv. the head of department undertakes a largely administrative function and there is little departmental identity;
 - v. little emphasis is given to staff development and INSET and the teachers find it challenging to cope with the demands of the business education curriculum;
 - vi. there is inadequate technical support to maintain the ICT resources.

The organisation of the curriculum in business education can be considered not good enough when:

- B.
- i. too little time is allocated to the subjects;
 - ii. there is an over-emphasis of business education in the curriculum; pupils are able to study business studies and economics and/or accounting concurrently.



3.4 The Development of Links Between the School and the Community

Links between the business education department and the community can be considered good when:

- A.
 - i. local or regional companies help to promote the pupils' understanding of business; pupils value business through practical projects, including coursework;
 - ii. the teachers are up-to-date about commercial practice in local companies;
 - iii. personnel from business provide speakers and advice on the content of assignments; the pupils know and work with people who are positive role models from the business world.

3.5 Accommodation and Resources

Accommodation and resources can be considered suitable and sufficient when:

- A.
 - i. the accommodation allows the requirements of the programme of study for business studies to be met; classroom space for all business education subjects is sufficient to ensure the safety of staff and pupils; furniture and fittings should be movable to enable group work to take place easily;
 - ii. there is a sufficient range of resources in all business education subjects, including audio-visual aids, current printed materials, including daily newspapers, journals and CD-ROMs to meet the needs of the pupils; there is an adequate and up-to-date range of book and non-book materials across the range of disciplines in business education;
 - iii. the business studies classroom has a minimum of ten computers around the perimeter of the room.

The use of accommodation and resources can be considered effective when:

- A.
 - i. the rooms are used for an optimum time each day; other subjects have access to the computers when not used for business studies or secretarial subjects;
 - ii. the computers are well serviced;
 - iii. the accommodation is clean and well maintained.



Links between the business studies department and the community can be considered not good enough when:

- B.
 - i. little attempt is made to relate business education in school to the real world of business;
 - ii. there are few contacts with local or regional companies for case studies, assignments, speakers or visits;
 - iii. industrial links are confined to infrequent visits by the pupils to business and pupils do not use the information in follow-up class work, or coursework.

Accommodation and resources can be considered not suitable and sufficient when:

- B.
 - i. the accommodation is too small; the furniture and fittings are fixed and hinder the use of group work or business studies and/or economics are taught in a computer room normally used for word-processing;
 - ii. the range of resources are either out of date or limited; pupils do not have ready access to a range of daily newspapers; there are few books or non-book materials across the range of disciplines in business education in the library; pupils do not have access to electronic sources of information;
 - iii. there are few, if any computers in the business studies classroom; typewriters are used.

The use of accommodation and resources can be considered not effective enough when:

- B.
 - i. the rooms are not used for an optimum time each day; other subjects do not have access to the computers when they are not used for business studies or secretarial subjects;
 - ii. typewriters are used; the computers are obsolete and/or poorly serviced;
 - iii. the accommodation is untidy and poorly maintained.





CONCLUSION

It is hoped that this booklet will be of value to those who work in and with schools, including parents, and to others who are interested in education and who are committed to the improvement of teaching and learning in business education. In a climate where self-evaluation and self-improvement are a strong part of the thinking of many teachers, this booklet is intended to contribute to those processes.





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