



**A subject-based aspect report on provision in Scotland's colleges by HM Inspectors on behalf of the Scottish Funding Council**



**Business, management and administration**  
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## Introduction

The HM Inspectorate of Education (HMIE) publication, *External quality arrangements for Scotland's colleges, September 2008*, specifies that HMIE will produce a number of subject aspect reports over the four years 2008-12. These reports complement in a subject-specific context the generic evaluations of learning and teaching in HMIE's reports of colleges. Colleges should act on the recommendations contained in these reports. College inspectors will monitor action towards implementation of these recommendations as part of their normal dialogue with colleges, and will wish to discuss issues arising from subject aspect reports during annual engagement visits.

In preparing this report, inspectors visited a sample of eight colleges, drew on the findings of published HMIE reviews of colleges, and examined other relevant publications and reports. They consulted with key stakeholders, including the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA), employers, professional bodies and *Scotland's Colleges*.

This report evaluates college programmes within a wide range of disciplines subsumed within the business, management and administration (BMA) area. The disciplines covered are: business and finance; economics; law; management; public administration; international business studies; enterprise; management skills; management planning and control systems; human resource management; financial management/accounting; financial services; office skills; typing/shorthand/secretarial skills; and marketing and public relations. In undertaking the fieldwork, particular emphasis has been given to the general areas of accounting, business, administration and management, because colleges offer most BMA programmes in these areas. Retail, sales and distribution, and information technology (in its technical aspects) are not covered in this report. Programmes covered by this report are offered in a variety of modes at levels 4 to 11 of the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF), but the report does not evaluate degree provision.

## Methodology

Each college in the sample of eight was visited twice during the fieldwork. Inspectors observed learning and teaching and discussed issues with staff and learners. The views of a wide range of stakeholders were obtained through face-to-face and telephone interviews. In a number of colleges, areas for development identified by inspectors during the first visit had been addressed by curriculum managers and teaching staff by the time of the second visit. In a few colleges, for example, where initial feedback suggested that lessons were insufficiently learner-centred, improvements were observed by the second visits. Where a lack of practical activity in some sessions had been observed in the early visits, teaching staff had responded well and reviewed some of their lesson planning to make improvements in this area by the second visit. In a few colleges, lack of

detailed written feedback on learners' work sampled was identified as an area for development, and improvement was noted on our return visits. A list of colleges visited for the report may be found in Appendix 1.

In addition to the evidence obtained from the eight colleges that participated in the fieldwork stage, HMIE also drew on the evaluations contained in the published review reports of 30 colleges between May 2005 and September 2008. During the 2004-2008 review cycle, HMIE evaluated provision in a range of BMA disciplines. Evidence from these reviews has helped to identify areas of progress as well as highlight issues that continue to require attention.

This aspect report evaluates current practice, and identifies important areas for discussion and further development amongst practitioners. It identifies excellent practice found by HM Inspectors and sets out recommendations for improvement.

Business, management and administration provision in Scotland's colleges is characterised by many strengths:

- Across the sector, Scotland's colleges offer a suitably wide range of programmes that draw on all BMA disciplines. These programmes are sequenced logically and provide very good progression opportunities for learners who wish to build on initial study and seek more advanced academic and vocational qualifications, or proceed directly to employment.
- The effective working relationships between SQA, staff in Scotland's colleges, many professional bodies and employers have resulted in the development and delivery of a suite of higher national awards that enjoys a strong reputation among all stakeholders.
- Learners from a wide range of educational backgrounds have accessed BMA programmes successfully as part of their lifelong learning activities to take their first steps in post-compulsory education, proceed to Higher National (HN) and degree programmes, get jobs, or use the skills and knowledge gained to obtain promotion in their organisations.
- Learning in the various BMA disciplines usually takes place within a well structured framework in a purposeful environment. The most successful learners have high aspirations, make good use of their own work experience where this exists, and develop good problem-solving and interpersonal skills.
- Much of the teaching in BMA is up to date, makes good use of real-life or case study material, and ensures that learners are aware of current practice and developments. The majority of learners are making increased use of information and communications technology (ICT). In a few instances, well-planned use of the virtual learning environment (VLE), up-to-date ICT-based learning materials, and ready learner and staff access to facilities lead to particularly stimulating programme delivery.
- Most BMA learners settle well into early life at college thanks to helpful pre-entry support, welcoming induction programmes, and early intervention by staff to identify and meet specific individual needs. They feel well supported by caring and competent staff before and during their period of study in colleges.
- Arrangements for summative assessment (the process of identifying suitability for certification and the attaining of awards) are systematic and rigorous overall. Many learners in all disciplines make good use of assessments as an integral part of the learning process.
- Many learners achieve highly satisfactory outcomes relating to personal development, raised social awareness and qualities required for good citizenship. Most learners on BMA programmes make good use of clearly defined pathways for progression to more advanced study.

- In many colleges, BMA staff have reviewed and improved the portfolio of programmes on offer and made changes to reflect shifts in employer demand, learner preferences or staff expertise.
- Some learner groups and individual learners contribute effectively to continuous quality improvement by participating fully in quality assurance processes, voicing their concerns, putting forward ideas for change and initiating improvements.

In parallel with the above strengths, we noted several areas for development relating to learner participation, learning and teaching approaches, and assessment which should be addressed to improve the experience for many learners.

- Learners in many classes are allowed to remain too passive. Questioning techniques are not refined enough to ensure effective participation by all learners.
- In many instances, staff could do more to ensure that learners are encouraged to discuss and challenge theoretical assumptions or question the validity of aspects of current practice. Learners could develop further their critical skills by putting forward, defending or challenging views expressed by their peers or by staff.
- For a few learners, the slow pace of learning, an over-reliance on traditional teaching approaches, or staff failure to deal adequately with disruptive behaviour impact adversely on the learner experience.
- The learning and teaching approaches in further education (FE) programmes are not always stimulating enough to engage learners fully.
- There are instances where staff have not yet found ways of harnessing and further developing the ICT resources available to enhance learning, teaching and learner support.
- Outdated materials, poorly organised classroom discussions and perfunctory feedback severely restrict the scope for ongoing assessment to enhance learning.
- A significant proportion of learners who embark on BMA programmes do not obtain a qualification. More needs to be done to identify and analyse the factors driving retention, attainment and achievement.

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To address the areas in need of improvement, BMA staff would benefit from help given by college managers and key stakeholders in the following areas.

- There is insufficient information on the extent to which BMA learners who move on from colleges to higher education institutions (HEIs) achieve success on degree programmes.
- The extent to which successful learners obtain jobs or promotion is another area where the quality and quantity of information available nationally at present is insufficient.
- The continuing professional development (CPD) of staff delivering BMA programmes requires ongoing attention. There are still a few examples of BMA learners and staff clinging to traditional 'teacher knows best' views, and managers need to be more proactive in winning minds and making true learner engagement a reality.
- Subject-specific CPD and updating are insufficiently well established. A particular challenge faced by BMA managers is the need to ensure that staff who have been in post for a long time undertake periodic updating. More needs to be done to plan secondments systematically, to enable all staff to maintain currency in their fields and use the latest external developments to enhance the learner experience.

The Scottish Government's skills strategy - *Skills for Scotland: A Lifelong Skills Strategy*<sup>1</sup> – envisages a 21<sup>st</sup> century Scotland where:

- people can work in teams, are creative and enterprising;
- people are entrepreneurial and innovative; small businesses are encouraged to grow and there is strong, coherent support for businesses of all sizes;
- employers improve productivity by investing in their own staff and are able to access a skilled workforce that is increasingly literate and numerate with good ICT and problem solving skills; and
- learning and training providers work as one system.

The document identifies a particular aspect that gives cause for concern:

*Scotland's skills profile has been improving faster than that of the rest of the UK with the percentage of the working age population with a higher education qualification rising by 8% between 1997 and 2004 compared with 6% in the rest of the UK. Scotland has not, however, matched the UK economic growth rate despite its positive skills profile.*

Consequently:

*the task for all those involved in delivering, learning or using skills is in unlocking this potential and ensuring that the investment we make in skills and business growth and creating appropriate conditions for these to flourish, helps to drive the steep change in economic growth to which we aspire.*

The Scottish Government is committed to the implementation of *Curriculum for Excellence*. Consequently, it is likely that increasing numbers of young learners who will be coming to college in future will be *successful learners, confident individuals, responsible citizens* and *effective contributors*. Their expectations and potential for further development will be enhanced by their school experience, and this has implications for college staff.

While the above points are of general relevance, a few issues raised are of particular significance to the BMA disciplines:

- small business growth is a key component of future success;
- employers have to invest more in training and skills development for their workforce; and
- teamwork and partnerships are crucial if Scotland is to succeed.

Inevitably, almost every individual and organisation will look to BMA disciplines in part to achieve this success. For example, without effective human resource

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2007/09/06091114/0>



management, financial and business management skills and marketing of products developed, Scotland cannot hope to achieve the progress desired. An important additional output from BMA provision is the development of the leaders and managers of tomorrow.

Many BMA learners will aspire to positions of responsibility that will impact directly on the lives and career hopes of others. Enterprise will be a key factor in their success.

***Dumfries and Galloway College: Dagcol's Den – developing enterprise skills and motivating learners***

*Based on the popular television series 'Dragons' Den', this activity has been devised by Dumfries and Galloway College to help develop entrepreneurship amongst learners and also as a way of motivating them and inspiring them to be creative. The project encourages learners to build on previous knowledge gained through early study of marketing, finance and communication and allows them to research potential inventions or business ideas. The member of staff currently delivering this unit within the college is a part-time inventor, with a few patents registered with the patent office. This has been a very inspiring background for the learners.*

*Learners are encouraged to work in groups and balance their time in class between gaining relevant theoretical underpinning knowledge, and creating proto-types and plans ready for presentation to a panel of 'dragons'. 'Dragons' include senior staff in the college, including the principal, and local business people. A participant from the real TV 'Dragons' Den' has in the past been part of the panel, which added a particularly exciting dimension for learners.*

*The final goal is for groups to pitch their business ideas to the panel towards the end of the unit, with the panel voting for the most attractive idea. This year some sponsorship has been secured to allow a financial prize to be made available. This kind of initiative has the potential to expand and become a national event with colleges competing across the sector.*

To be genuinely successful, entrepreneurs usually will have to combine individual enterprise with effective teamwork.

***Cardonald College: Developing the Individual within a Team – interesting projects engage learners well***

*HND learners have worked effectively with the curriculum team to develop project ideas which enhance the content of the SQA unit Developing an Individual within a Team. In response to the unit requirements which ask learners to plan, implement and evaluate a team project, some particular successes have been achieved through interesting and unusual activity.*

*One group organised and staffed the Cardonald College stand at Tartan Day in Rouken Glen Park during the Easter break of 2009 as part of the wider Homecoming Scotland campaign. Through this project, they worked with East Renfrewshire Council to develop, carry out and present the findings of a market research survey to establish a profile of the visitors who came to Tartan Day, including how they found out about the event and their opinions of it. One of the learners had previous experience in market research which greatly contributed to the survey being developed to a professional standard. Three others within the group carried out the research while another two presented the findings to East Renfrewshire Council. Feedback on the process was very positive from the council.*

*Another group organised an enterprising team building day for a group of S1 young people from local secondary schools. This involved planning a suitable exercise, contacting schools to identify potential participants, organising the catering and prizes for the event and raising funds to pay for materials and prizes. The learners then carried out the event and gathered feedback from the young people and teachers. The feedback was very positive, particularly from one school Enterprise Officer, who was keen to repeat the exercise as it was so successful. Not only did the learners fulfil the requirements of the unit specification but they now have useful experience which can help them to build their essential skills and enhance their CVs.*

*A third project, currently in its early stages, encourages and develops skills relating to entrepreneurship in Scotland, Finland and Germany. Regional regeneration is important to all three countries, and entrepreneurship includes several key subjects common to all. Learners are deciding on a type of business which they wish to set up in their own country, eg a café, souvenir shop, farm museum. They will investigate fully the type of support available to them in their own country for this type of small business, and share this information with their overseas counterparts. The information will be made available via the VLE, which staff and learners will be able to access. A comparison will be made of similarities and differences. Once the viability of establishing the business has been established, learners will carry out market research in the UK and with their overseas counterparts to help determine the optimum ways of marketing their new business overseas.*

## 4 | Programmes in business, management and administration

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Forty of Scotland's 43 colleges offered programmes and units in BMA disciplines during 2008-09. A significantly high proportion of this provision is at higher education (HE) level (SCQF level 7 and above). BMA programmes at further education (FE) level (SCQF levels 4-6) are mainly aimed at learners who have no previous knowledge of BMA disciplines. Programmes necessarily include units relating to IT and communication as well as introductory units in mainstream BMA disciplines. As discussed later in the report, these FE-level programmes are largely building blocks to facilitate further study at HE level rather than routes to immediate employment.

Most BMA programmes at HN level are designed centrally by SQA, but there has also been systematic consultation with a wide range of appropriate stakeholders. For example, the HNC/D Accounting programme being delivered in colleges in 2009-10 involved consultation in 2004 with:

- colleges and other centres offering the award;
- employers and industry bodies in the accounting field;
- learners who had recently completed the award;
- higher education institutions (HEIs) to which successful learners would progress; and
- professional accountancy bodies.

A wide range of stakeholders contributed to the review of a 'core and options' model which combined shared expectations with necessary flexibility. Also, SQA took account of the outcomes of parallel consultation in respect of related HN awards for Business, Administration and Information Technology, and Financial Services. Consequently, a large number of units are common to all these awards, leading to flexibility and opportunities for learners to obtain transferable unit qualifications. At the same time, Scottish Vocational Qualifications (SVQs) for work-based learners have also been revised to link better with HN units.

Not surprisingly, therefore, employers and other stakeholders are highly satisfied overall with the content of BMA programmes in colleges at HE level. Successful learners at this level generally have appropriate skills for employment in the different disciplines.

Employers also speak highly of the colleges' flexibility and willingness to develop short or part-time programmes to meet specific individual or company needs. Among programmes being delivered in this way are several training programmes leading to Institute of Leadership and Management (ILM) and Chartered Management Institute (CMI) qualifications, SVQs at Level 3 and 4, and accountancy training packages or marketing units delivered to help small businesses enhance their expertise. In addition to benefiting employers, learners benefit from collaborative provision involving professional bodies, employers and colleges.

***Elmwood College: enhancing the learner experience - partnership working with Fife Council incorporating an Extended Learning Experience (ELE) within management programmes***

*The college has formed a very strong partnership with Fife Council, delivering its first-line management programmes, initially through the NEBSM programmes, then the ILM, and currently the CMI professional awarding body. Over the last ten years, this has evolved into a relationship which is highly regarded by both organisations.*

*One of the essential elements of the council's management programme has been an extension to the formal taught components called the ELE, which is delivered by the college as part of the training. This is a two-day programme which offers council managers problem solving scenarios where they can apply the knowledge and skills acquired in the classroom. These are hands-on activities which test the skills of managers in communication, leadership, teamwork, planning, organising and time management. The feedback from the many groups of learners who have benefitted from the two-day experience has been consistently positive. Importantly, the comprehensive review of the ELE activities when learners return to the classroom allows a period of reflection and comparison to situations that the managers encounter in their own workplace allowing them to fully benefit from the links that can be made. On occasions, changes are made to this part of the programme in response to learner reflection on its relevance to real life situations.*

*The ELE activity is now regarded by the awarding bodies as good practice and has been favourably commented on in their quality visits. The college is able to deliver a full or customised version for other organisations that require management training programmes.*

BMA programmes are designed to enable successful learners to gain sound underpinning knowledge and skills needed for progression to more advanced studies at HEIs or to higher level examinations set by numerous professional bodies. All colleges welcome learners with few or no prior qualifications to FE programmes. Pre-entry information and guidance play a key role in ensuring that learners are fully conversant with what is on offer and can make appropriate choices.

Many colleges also offer part-time school-college partnership programmes in business, administration and financial services to young people in S3 and above. These programmes (which include those developed under the *Skills for Work* initiative) have helped young people to progress from school, and benefit from and enjoy the different staff-learner relationships and learning environment, including technological facilities that exist in colleges.

Recent years have seen the expansion of several BMA programmes for international learners. Scotland's colleges are playing a proactive role in taking forward the *knowledge transfer* agenda of the Scottish Government. Programmes in accounting, finance, business, management, and skills development and training are increasingly being delivered to international learners either in their own countries or in Scotland. International contacts provide two-way benefits and learners in Scotland's colleges are making good use of imaginative provision to widen their own horizons.

***Angus College: enriching professional skills and abilities for HND Administration and Information Technology learners through work experience in Italy***

*Following the successful pilot of a two-week work placement programme in south west Italy, the HND Administration and Information Technology learners at Angus College are now offered this opportunity as an integral part of their programme. The project, supported by European Leonardo funding, supports learners to undertake an intensive foreign language course and a work placement in an Italian business. The trip also enhances learner skills in the areas of motivation, confidence and personal achievement.*

*From the outset, learners are involved in the planning process and are thereafter engaged in the organisation and evaluation of the whole experience. Throughout the placement, learners work in designated companies based on their professional competencies and participate in daily Italian language classes. As a result, learners acquire a cultural awareness through vocational and social interaction. Positive feedback has been received from the placement companies involved and the overall project evaluation has been very successful. The strong partnership links which have been established between the learners and the placement providers throughout the whole experience are summed up by Italian partners, thus:*

*'Participants moulded themselves personally, became more flexible and adaptable to new cultural and professional environments, became able to identify their priorities and gained new skills while working as part of a team.'*

*A dedicated blog was also set up to communicate the learners' experiences and on return from the trip in March 2010 one learner encapsulated their main highlights as:*

*'Working in another country and learning the Italian language, gaining an insight to how different companies work, experiencing a different culture, meeting new people and making lots of new friends for me was such an amazing opportunity.'*

*On successful completion of the programme, the learners are presented with a European Work Placement Certificate and an International Study Skills Certificate.*

**Central College Glasgow: high quality engagement between learners and industry specialists - HND Advertising and public relations (PR) annual study trip to New York**

Over a ten year period, this integral part of the programme has developed to its current format where most HN learners spend a week in New York, visiting agencies in and around Madison Avenue, regarded as the epicentre of the advertising and communication industries. This component of the programme is mentioned in marketing material and promoted throughout enrolment and during classes. It offers a major opportunity for learners to raise their aspirations.

Learners are engaged in the whole process from the planning stage through to the evaluation on their return. Generally, they visit a minimum of six agencies and experience a variety of activities including presentations by speakers, workshops, assessments and 'live' briefs. Each day is based on a typical working day in each of the agencies. Learners are encouraged to embrace the opportunities presented in such a large and interesting city and to experience as much of life as a New Yorker as they can in the week-long assignment.

Feedback from the agencies who work with the college is very positive and highlights how well prepared learners are before they arrive and how well organised the whole experience is for them:

*'I really enjoyed meeting you and the group and wish I had more time with you. They asked some great questions and seemed eager to learn – something sometimes missing in American students.'*

Learners often record their sometimes life-changing experiences using a blog and the trip in March 2010 inspired one participant to write:

*'This trip was not about shopping and the buildings, it was a place that opened up my mind and reassured me that the communications industry is where I see myself in the future....It was a trip that truly inspired me and one I will never forget'.*

Research elsewhere suggests that irrespective of the type and level of BMA provision on offer, where it is located, and what educational background the learners come from, there are certain characteristics of nearly all effective BMA education that are crucial to learner success:

- the development and application of essential skills is fundamental to learner progress;
- learners need to acquire a knowledge base in order to gain a meaningful understanding of what the various BMA-related occupations, vocations and professions have to offer. The development of this knowledge base can and should go hand-in-hand with practical work where appropriate; and
- only through skills development and the acquisition of knowledge and understanding can BMA learners appreciate the relevance of what they are learning, feel motivated to learn independently and in groups, and make meaningful progress towards attaining their goals which may include leadership and management and motivation of others.

The extent to which college processes have been successful in developing core skills, providing a knowledge base incorporating practical work as appropriate and motivating learners is covered in the various paragraphs concerned with learning and teaching. The outcomes are reflected in the report's findings on assessment, attainment and wider achievement.

Although there are numerous good examples of provision that meets learner needs well, the range and suitability of FE programmes in BMA need further attention. The main issues are the provision of comprehensive and accurate pre-entry information to learners, and the further evaluation of learning and teaching approaches.

Learners enrolling on FE programmes, particularly younger or fragile learners, need to be made aware that they are embarking on a long-term career. In the early part of this journey, returns are largely developmental and related to enhancing learners' own personal and life skills. The main priority is the unlocking of potential and the removal of barriers to individual progress. At the same time, the key to success in BMA disciplines is hard work, particularly in the development of skills allied to an essential knowledge base.

Marketing BMA programmes meaningfully to learners can be challenging. Younger learners in particular may opt for what they see as more exciting areas that lead to quicker results in terms of jobs directly related to their studies such as care, hairdressing or catering. It is important, therefore, that staff recruiting BMA learners have exciting learning and teaching approaches which can be highlighted at interview stage. For instance, the examples of excellence identified in this report would be a powerful marketing tool to inform and engage prospective entrants to BMA programmes at FE level.

Learning in the various BMA disciplines usually takes place within well-structured programmes in a purposeful environment. Consequently, most learners are well motivated and enjoy their programmes. They undertake a variety of activities, and there is a good deal of emphasis on the completion of specific tasks and projects. Well-prepared notes, handouts and nationally devised materials help learners to gain an initial understanding of key concepts, and then build on their early experience to extend this. Most learners participate well in classroom discussions and there is often good teamwork with learners helping each other to enhance their knowledge and understanding. Enhanced learning through the use of ICT is increasingly commonplace with most learners making increased use of VLE facilities where these are available. In the most successful programmes, learners have high aspirations, make good use of their own work experience where this exists and develop good problem-solving and interpersonal skills. Very importantly, their growing interest in and appreciation of BMA disciplines encourages them to explore issues further, undertake independent learning and learn beyond the minimum necessary to attain unit and group awards. In a few instances, learners play an active role in determining the focus of individual lessons and lead discussions effectively with minimal input from teaching staff.

A significant amount of teaching at all levels in many BMA disciplines is necessarily concerned with how to carry out tasks in line with received wisdom, custom and practice, and legislative or professional imperatives. While this is essential, truly effective teaching in these disciplines takes place when learners understand why particular approaches and practices are necessary. Without this additional, important dimension, learning takes place within limited parameters. In many instances, staff could do more to ensure that learners are encouraged to discuss or even challenge theoretical assumptions or question the validity of aspects of current practice, in order to become more effective contributors in future.

The learning and teaching approaches used in FE programmes need particular attention. In the early stages, the focus has to be on engaging learners while helping them to acquire basic skills which serve as essential building blocks to further progress. For example, *communication* and *numeracy* skills have to be developed, sometimes in the face of diffidence from individual learners. Listening skills and the ability to conceptualise are also vital for learners to progress, and the contextualisation of materials, together with exposure to real-life examples and situations, helps to make learning more interesting and meaningful. All these initiatives have to include learners talking to each other and with staff to develop the skills of interactive social engagement and the development of teamwork skills, which are both essential for success in BMA disciplines.

Almost all staff are well qualified in one or more of the BMA disciplines, either academically or through membership of a wide range of professional bodies. Many of them maintain outside business interests, have continuing links with their professional bodies, or carry out periodic consultancies and training activities for external clients. Their teaching in BMA is up to date, makes good use of real-life or case study material and ensures that learners are aware of current practice and developments.



Overall, BMA teachers use a suitably wide range of teaching strategies within classroom and tutorial sessions. Many learners take part in work-based projects, undertake work placements and participate in innovative activity in the wider community that helps to enhance their employability and citizenship skills.

***Langside College: involvement in innovative activity to enhance employability skills***

*The Student Project has been run in Scotland by DADA since 2006 to provide learners with an excellent opportunity to acquire industry experience while developing their practical knowledge of marketing and business theories, tools and frameworks. This is a real-life marketing experience, taking learners out of the hypothetical to develop and, crucially, implement marketing strategies for global brands.*

*DADA is one of the country's fastest growing marketing agency with a roster of over 200 major consumer brands reinforcing its track record in delivering very positive results. The company is a multi-award winning, full service agency, comprising PR, events and advertising divisions. The Student Project provides the opportunity to undertake real-life work for global brands, including News International, owners of the Sunday Times, The Times, The Sun and News of the World in the UK. It generates huge publicity for education establishments and provides learners with unrivalled access to key marketing and business individuals in Scotland. Learners receive guest lectures and week by week support from directors.*

*Learners are tasked with undertaking a live, practical project on behalf of [www.itison.com](http://www.itison.com). This is a unique service provided by DADA which puts members on the guest list of events in Scotland. Learners are required to create, present and implement a marketing plan to register individuals with [www.itison.com](http://www.itison.com). Learners are also tasked with recommending a promotional idea for The Scottish Sun which is capable of driving Scottish Sun objectives and delivering incremental sales. The project is managed by a team at DADA on a day to day basis, providing ongoing support.*

*Following preliminary judging of each team of learners, finalist teams from each college or university are invited to attend the project finale. Judging is based on clear demonstration of an understanding of the marketing communication strategy, evidence of original thinking and innovative use of marketing and promotional ideas that fit the brand objectives and also total number of registrants achieved by the group. The winning team earns a trip to New York plus the opportunity to undertake work experience placements at News International offices in Scotland, ticketSOUP.com™ and DADA offices. These placements are hugely valuable and have helped previous winners to achieve their career aspirations.*

BMA learners develop strong team-working and problem-solving skills through group and project work. These programmes also help learners to attain ICT and *numeracy* skills. The development of *communication* skills at FE level in particular is more variable, and poor questioning techniques employed in many classroom situations fail to ensure that all learners are involved in putting forward, defending or challenging views expressed by their peers or by staff.

In addition to their individual knowledge and professional competence, teachers of BMA disciplines have developed a strong sense of teamwork within individual colleges in recent years. With increased national networking, including through consortia which monitor qualifications, there is a greater understanding within departments of different approaches to BMA programmes across Scotland, and staff are able to build on their various strengths while addressing issues that require further improvement. In most instances, the above factors taken together lead to effective teaching, well adapted where necessary to meet the specific needs of individual learners. On occasion, however, a few learners are passive during lessons and questioning techniques are not sensitive enough to ensure participation by all learners.

In most BMA departments, staff plan lessons well to ensure that learners are able to build logically and systematically from prior learning. Sensible sequencing of the delivery of topics within and across units enables learners in most instances to consolidate and integrate learning, and make connections between the various subjects studied. In many departments, staff make productive use of links with employers and other external organisations to enhance the quality of the learner experience using guest speakers and visits to industry. Work shadowing and international project work provide additional dimensions for learner progress. In a few instances, effective partnership working based on good links between college staff and their HEI partners has led to enhancement in programme delivery.

In several colleges, the availability and use of high-quality physical and technical resources enhance the quality of learning and teaching. In many instances, well-planned use of the and up-to-date ICT based learning materials lead to stimulating programme delivery. Where staff use these facilities to encourage independent learning and the extension of knowledge and understanding, learners begin to develop high-order skills. By way of contrast, there are instances where staff have not yet found ways of harnessing and further developing the ICT resources available to enhance learning, teaching and learner support. For a few learners, the slow pace of learning, an over-reliance on traditional teaching approaches, or discipline problems caused by disruption in the classroom, impact adversely on the learner experience.

## **Guidance and support**

All college prospectuses give clear information on the content of BMA programmes, their main aims and objectives, and the career paths available after successful completion. Most BMA departments invite prospective full-time learners to interview, to ensure that full and accurate information underpins programme choice. The development of enhanced pre-entry guidance arrangements in recent years has included early diagnostic tests to ascertain learners' core skills levels and support needs at the point of entry. This is particularly important for learners embarking on first stage programmes. The growing use of personal learning plans has helped teaching staff to understand better the specific needs of individual learners and therefore adjust programme delivery and support to meet their needs. In many colleges, systematic on-course guidance ensures that staff remain sensitive to learner needs and can take remedial action or provide additional support when required. These arrangements also allow learners to set and reassess goals as appropriate and evaluate their own progress. In nearly all BMA departments, learners nearing the end of their programmes receive effective advice on the various career and study options available to them. Where appropriate, professional body representatives and HEI staff contribute to the information being provided.

Overall, learners on BMA programmes feel well supported by caring and competent staff before and during their period of study in colleges. Staff have worked hard in recent years to overcome the challenge posed by the generic nature of some BMA disciplines. A few learners entering FE programmes need significant initial support if they are to be inspired by some of the subjects on their programmes. The success of staff who overcome this challenge is evidenced in many cases by improving retention rates in particular programmes.

## **Assessment**

The majority of staff use various activities to assess learner progress to good effect. Particularly effective teachers use classroom questioning skilfully to assess the extent to which individual learners are making progress. In this way, learner achievement is recognised and praised, misconceptions are spotted, issues are discussed and explanations are given at the earliest stage. Consequently, deep learning takes place, learners are motivated and a firm base is provided for future learning.

On occasion, learners across all BMA disciplines make good use of practical tasks or case studies to demonstrate their knowledge, understanding and progress. This is an integral and highly effective part of the learning process. For example, in accounting, the regular use of practical worksheet examples enables learners to develop and monitor their problem-solving skills. Learners frequently use case study assignments to make connections between what they have learned in other BMA disciplines. Consequently, they develop the ability to learn independently and identify gaps in their knowledge. Learners find these high-quality activities engaging and motivating, especially when supported by stimulating teaching materials. However, a significant proportion of assessments do not achieve the same highly

desirable outcomes. For a few learners, outdated materials, poorly organised classroom discussions and perfunctory feedback severely restrict the scope for ongoing assessment to enhance learning.

Staff often provide very helpful feedback through formative assessment activities which makes it particularly effective. In many instances, staff use constructive, well-considered feedback to learners on an individual basis. This feedback may comprise either detailed annotations or written comments on work submitted by learners, or one-to-one feedback or guidance sessions. Most learners who have been encouraged to make good use of on-course assessment tackle formal end-of-unit tests with justifiable confidence. They have been involved in a wide range of learning situations, discussed issues, had their misconceptions clarified and build steadily on prior knowledge and understanding. Consequently, they have maximised their potential to achieve their desired award and make further progress thereafter.

Arrangements for summative assessment (the process of certification leading to the attainment of awards) are systematic and rigorous overall. Many BMA staff are highly knowledgeable and experienced in carrying out assessments. Their awareness of assessment aims and practices is backed up by work undertaken as external verifiers on programmes in other colleges, work undertaken on SQA national groups reviewing programmes in the various BMA areas, and the sharing of ideas and developments through the *Business Subject Network* group set up by Scotland's Colleges.

These contacts have helped staff in different colleges, for instance, to work together to develop assessment material for graded units within HN programmes. However, extension and more consistent use of existing networking arrangements is crucial to ensure that teaching staff delivering BMA programmes across all colleges accredit successful learners fairly and consistently, as well as using it to aid learning and support progress. This is particularly important in BMA programmes because so many successful learners progress to more advanced study at HEIs and/or seek further qualifications accredited by other external bodies and all of them need to commence further study from a common basis.

Overall, however, there are too many instances when assessment has not supported learning or promoted attainment effectively. Consequently, learners either undertake end-of-unit assessments with trepidation or absent themselves from the tests. Ironically, when classes have been 'coached' towards assessment, many learners find this work too focused on passing the test rather than on extending their learning. Many have been so de-motivated by this uninspiring approach that they do not attain success in the unit.

BMA staff, along with colleagues in other disciplines and support areas, have worked hard in recent years to improve levels of retention. As a result of helpful pre-entry advice and guidance, welcoming induction programmes, and early intervention by staff to identify and meet specific individual needs, most BMA learners settle well into early life at college. Once learners settle into college programmes, several factors such as the quality of programme delivery, personal motivation to face and overcome the inevitable intellectual challenges, personal and financial hurdles and the attraction of future employment, all impact on the proportion of learners who stay on to complete their programmes of study.

Success in coursework, end-of-unit tests, integrated units, and project work all contribute to learners attaining formal national awards. Importantly, many learners on BMA programmes in colleges also achieve highly satisfactory outcomes which may not contribute directly to a specific award.

***Carnegie College: Enterprise Club – the development of business aspirations and supporting new business start-up for staff and learners across the college***

*The Enterprise Club is held once every calendar month, with the aim of ensuring a commitment from all curriculum areas across the college in order to meet the following key objectives:*

- *to engage speakers from a range of business backgrounds who seek to share their experience, motivate and inspire others;*
- *to provide learners with immediate access to business start-up advice and sign posting for business related information; and*
- *to create a hub that fosters enterprise and draws membership from across the college community as an entirety.*

*National Certificate level learners within the School of Business and Society have responsibility for events planning, customer service, catering and marketing with input from other curriculum areas on topics and guest speakers. Led by a project team which is made up of representatives college-wide and with support and dedication from external partners (mainly entrepreneurs and local business people), the college regularly delivers well managed and organised events that enhance its reputation. As well as college staff who possess a high level of expertise in business start-up and self-employment, the Enterprise Club is supported by Business Gateway, Creative Fife and Shell Livewire.*

*The majority of learners are motivated by the opportunity to be involved with a project that is not classroom based and this is evidenced through high attendance levels and the general level of interaction between learners, staff and external guests. Learners demonstrably improve their self-confidence in speaking to people, as well as their written communication and presentation skills. External business entrepreneurs have commented positively on the Enterprise Club and many of the local entrepreneurs who have social enterprise interests are keen to engage with the learners. In turn, learners are inspired by the speakers' 'real-life' stories and see the opportunity to become involved with business enterprise themselves. Learner engagement levels are extremely high when they are given the opportunity to relate their vocational areas of interest to a real business opportunity. They are able to gain a realistic view of business in practice thus supporting and improving their employability skills and career aspirations. The Enterprise Club equips learners with the knowledge, information and confidence to consider becoming entrepreneurs, to reflect on the necessary skills, and to understand the meaning of citizenship in a broad social context.*

College programmes benefit learners in a number of ways. Part of a programme may consist of work placements which help learners to develop employability skills. Fund-raising for charities helps the development of citizenship skills and raises awareness of wider realities in society. Most importantly, many learners who have

not attained an award have developed interpersonal skills and self-confidence, which will improve their subsequent life chances. However, there can be no doubt that, attainment of a named award remains the primary goal of most learners.

The information in Table 1 (Appendix 2) reveals some important aspects of the outcomes of college provision.

- Most learners who enrol on college programmes remain on them for the first few months.
- Most of these learners stay on to complete their programmes of study.
- Most learners who complete their programmes obtain the award for which they have studied.

However, the attrition rate at each of the stages identified above means that a significant proportion of those who undertake programmes do not obtain the relevant award. Success rates for learners on full-time FE programmes are consistently lower than those for learners on other modes and levels of study. By contrast, other categories of learners achieve consistently higher rates of success. A wide range of factors impacts on learner attainment, so isolating prime causes of failure nationwide is not a practical or immediate proposition. BMA staff in colleges should continue to evaluate guidance, support, learning and teaching strategies while reflecting anew on some key issues raised in the relevant sections of this report.

### **Progression**

Successful learners on BMA programmes make good use of clearly defined pathways to progress further to more advanced study or into employment. FE programmes in accounting, business and administration link directly to HNC programmes. Learners who obtain awards at SCQF Level 6 usually progress to HNC in their own college with minimum disruption. A majority of colleges also offer HND programmes which afford further continuity and stability for learners. A few college-HEI partnerships allow learners to progress to degree level within their own college, with college staff being responsible for delivery of the year 3 (SCQF level 9) degree curriculum.

There are also many arrangements in place for BMA learners to progress to other colleges or to HEIs. Nearly all colleges have good articulation arrangements with HEIs supported, in many cases, by institutional frameworks for smooth learner transition. Other arrangements are more reliant on informal college-HEI links in individual discipline areas, but working relationships between college and HEI staff are generally harmonious and productive. As SQA's HN awards in the BMA area are mostly based on a core plus options model, this enables colleges to adopt a flexible approach in planning progression opportunities for learners. Learners, completing an HNC programme which includes relevant options stipulated by HEIs, are afforded direct entry into year two of HEI degree programmes. This seamless progression also applies to many HND holders who gain direct entry into year 3 of a 'partner' HEI's degree programme.

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There is insufficient information, however, on the extent to which BMA learners who move on from colleges to HEIs achieve success on degree programmes, although there is anecdotal evidence to confirm that many former college learners do well. Many learners who attain BMA awards in colleges get jobs related to the main discipline they have studied, and others move on to more senior posts in their organisation after being successful. This is another area where the quality and quantity of information available nationally at present does not permit any clear conclusions to be drawn. More Scotland-wide information would help decision makers and stakeholders to identify drivers of success and pinpoint the causes of attrition from programmes.



In recent years, staff in BMA disciplines have made significant improvements in the use of self-evaluation and internal review processes to reflect on the effectiveness of their work and make changes to enhance the learner experience. In many colleges, BMA staff have reviewed the portfolio of programmes on offer and made changes to reflect shifts in employer demand, learner preferences or staff expertise. BMA departments have focused on particular strengths (accounting, administration, business or management), given emphasis to new areas (enterprise), and made use of productive links with other colleges or with HEIs to rationalise provision while maintaining and enhancing learner choice.

Systematic annual programme reviews have resulted in BMA staff making changes to programme delivery to benefit learners. Common examples of this type of improvement are the re-sequencing of units within programmes, and changes to assessments to aid integrated learning and address the problem of assessment overload. Many BMA departments and programme teams have also put in place arrangements for peer review, team teaching and other activities that help staff to reflect collectively on the effectiveness of existing learning and teaching processes and plan improvement as necessary. Some staff, however, have yet to address learning and teaching issues wholeheartedly and comprehensively, in order to improve classroom practice and make learning a positive experience for all learners. There is considerable scope for staff across all BMA disciplines to work together to explore learning, teaching and assessment practice, and to identify and apply good practice. Existing good links within BMA subject networks should be built upon and extended. There is also much scope for BMA staff to engage in discussion with colleagues in other subject areas within their own college on pedagogic matters. Finally, many BMA staff in colleges have productive working relationships with HEI partners, but there is relatively little contact or interaction between the two groups on specific issues relating to learning, teaching and assessment.

Most BMA staff subscribe wholeheartedly to the determined efforts made by colleges in recent years to enhance learner engagement in quality processes. Within their own programme areas, learner-nominated class representatives are encouraged to work with programme managers and teaching staff to enhance the quality of all aspects of the learning experience. Many learner groups and individual learners make good use of the range of opportunities available to them. They are able to voice their concerns, put forward ideas for change and initiate improvements while simultaneously developing invaluable life skills through being engaged in these processes. However, there are still a few examples of BMA learners and staff not fully appreciating the value of learner engagement, and managers need to be more proactive in winning minds and making learner engagement a reality.

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Quality assurance in BMA departments focuses effectively on equality and diversity issues. An increase in the number of European Union (EU) and international learners gives further impetus to advancements in this area, and arrangements within colleges, including the suitability of learning and teaching materials confirm that progress is being made in promoting positive attitudes to equality and diversity.

BMA managers and staff are well aware of the need for CPD. Many new staff are enrolled on Teacher Qualification (Further Education) (TQFE) programmes and others are undertaking study for Professional Development Awards (PDAs). Colleges are generally effective in providing training in generic areas, for example equalities legislation and child protection. However, subject specific CPD and updating are not so well established. A particular challenge faced by BMA managers is the need to ensure that staff who have been in post for a long time undertake periodic updating. Their pedagogic experience and expertise are not always matched by recent experience of practice in commerce, industry or the professions. More needs to be done to plan secondments systematically, to enable all staff to maintain currency in their specialist areas and use the latest external developments to enhance the learner experience.

An important area where a few BMA departments have made good progress is in the use of external agencies and individuals to contribute to college quality assurance (QA) processes. The effective use of *Industry Liaison Boards* enhances the quality of programme review and delivery not only through the direct input of external expertise but also through the welcome support provided by external contacts in terms of work placements, guest lectures, job shadowing and resource provision.

### ***Edinburgh's Telford College: Career Academy creates opportunities for NC Business learners***

*The introduction of a themed Career Academy to Edinburgh's Telford College has opened up a new opportunity for learner and employer engagement. This initiative has brought together the college and local businesses at a strategic level in order to plan joint initiatives to the benefit of the college and learners, as well as to business and their employees.*

*The college recognised that there was a lack of opportunity for engagement between them and local businesses, particularly in the subject areas of business and finance. Learners undertaking qualifications in these subjects did not have the opportunity to experience the practical application of the theory they were learning. Equally, businesses did not have the opportunity to influence directly or contribute to the education of those who will ultimately be their workforce. The new site for the college is some distance from the city centre, presenting further challenges in the establishment of relationships with businesses in these sectors who tend to operate from a city centre site. The solution was to introduce a themed Career Academy through the UK Career Academy movement <http://www.careeracademies.org.uk/>.*

*The focus for this activity was the full-time NC Business programme within the college. A Local Advisory Board (LAB) was first established to steer the Career Academy activity. This is chaired by senior local business people and its members are from the college and from local companies. The purpose is to use the business networks of the LAB members to increase support for the college programme. In addition to the LAB, the four key features of the programme are:*

- paid internships of 6 weeks' duration in participating organisations for all learners;*
- Partners in Business (mentor) programme enabling recent employees to work directly with college learners;*
- guru lecturers and joint events or visits to enhance the learning experience; and*
- the opportunity for learners to participate in national and regional events organised centrally for all Career Academy learners across the UK.*

*Career Academy learners are generally aged 16–19 and have very limited prior access to role models in the workplace. Through first-hand exposure to business professionals, these young people have begun to develop into confident and competent citizens. Working in partnership together, the college and the participating businesses are shaping the education and aspirations of young people who are the workforce of the future.*

The Scottish Funding Council (SFC) should:

- work with colleges and HEIs to improve methods of tracking the longer-term career progression of college graduates.

*Scotland's Colleges* should:

- strongly encourage the further development of a thriving *Business Subject Network* incorporating staff teaching in all BMA disciplines in colleges;
- support the *Business Subject Network* by providing opportunities for subject-related CPD, including activity aimed at enhancing the quality of learning and teaching, and assessment approaches; and
- assemble a compendium of peer review and lesson observation processes currently in use in the sector to collate and disseminate examples of good practice.

Colleges should:

- ensure that pre-entry guidance, particularly for FE programmes, is comprehensive in informing learners about the scope and nature of BMA disciplines;
- improve their learning and teaching approaches to involve learners more actively in planning and managing their own learning;
- ensure that learning and teaching approaches are stimulating and thought-provoking, and help develop deep understanding of key concepts and current practice;
- harness and further develop ICT resources to enhance learning, teaching and learner support;
- ensure that feedback on learner progress always supports the learning process consistently and effectively; and
- ensure that staff in the different BMA disciplines explore learning, teaching and assessment practice with each other, more widely within and across colleges and with HEI partners, to identify and adopt best practice.

HMIE should

- continue to monitor progress made in terms of the above recommendations through their annual engagements with colleges, and disseminate information on key improvements as they emerge across the sector.

#### Colleges visited in the fieldwork for this report

- Angus College
- Cardonald College
- Carnegie College
- Central College Glasgow
- Dumfries and Galloway College
- Edinburgh's Telford College
- Elmwood College
- Langside College

## Appendix 2

**Table 1: Business, management and administration programmes  
Summary of data over three years**

The following information, gathered from data submitted to SFC by colleges and adapted as appropriate, relates to BMA retention, completion and attainment over the last three years. The focus is on the number of full-time and part-time learners on FE and HE programmes. Many individual learners will have enrolled for more than one unit.

2006-07

Mode	Level	Enrolled	Funded	Completed	Succeeded	Retention	Completion	Success
FT	FE	2639	2201	1665	1255	83.4%	75.6%	75.3%
FT	HE	4791	4308	3387	2715	89.9%	78.6%	80.2%
PT	FE	16623	16209	15614	14085	97.5%	96.3%	90.2%
PT	HE	6476	6055	5718	4867	93.5%	88.6%	85.1%

2007-08

Mode	Level	Enrolled	Funded	Completed	Succeeded	Retention	Completion	Success
FT	FE	3170	2658	1933	1480	83.8%	72.7%	76.6%
FT	HE	4566	4082	3320	2748	89.4%	81.3%	82.8%
PT	FE	9517	9077	8609	7539	95.4%	94.8%	87.6%
PT	HE	6784	6403	6044	4796	94.4%	94.4%	79.4%

2008-09

Mode	Level	Enrolled	Funded	Completed inc. non- assessed	Completed exc. non- assessed	Succeeded exc. non- assessed	Retention	Completion
FT	FE	2942	2490	1929	1915	1538	84.6%	77.5%
FT	HE	4961	4449	3729	3729	3049	89.7%	83.8%
PT	FE	14043	13538	11732	6937	5814	96.4%	86.7%
PT	HE	6138	5825	4792	4792	3952	94.9%	82.3%

**Glossary of terms**

BMA	Business, Management and Administration
CPD	Continuing Professional Development
CMI	Chartered Management Institute
CV	Curriculum Vitae
ELE	Extended Learning Experience
EU	European Union
FE	Further Education
FT	Full-time
HE	Higher Education
HEI	Higher Education Institution
HMIE	HM Inspectorate of Education
HN	Higher National
HNC	Higher National Certificate
HND	Higher National Diploma
ICT	Information and Communications Technology
ILM	Institute of Leadership and Management
LAB	Local Advisory Board
NC	National Certificate
NEBSM	National Examining Board in Supervisory Management
PDA	Professional Development Award
PR	Public Relations
PT	Part-time
QA	Quality Assurance
SCQF	Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework
SFC	Scottish Funding Council
SQA	Scottish Qualifications Authority
SVQ	Scottish Vocational Qualification
TQ (FE)	Teacher Qualification (Further Education)
VLE	Virtual learning environment

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