

**REPORT
FROM THE
INSPECTORATE**

Josiah Mason College

July 1994

**THE
FURTHER
EDUCATION
FUNDING
COUNCIL**

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The Further Education Funding Council (FEFC) has a statutory duty to ensure that there are satisfactory arrangements to assess the quality of provision in the further education sector. It discharges the duty in part through its inspectorate, which inspects and reports on each college in the sector every four years. The Council's inspectorate also assesses and reports on a national basis on specific curriculum areas and advises the Council's quality assessment committee.

College inspections involve both full-time inspectors and registered part-time inspectors who have specialist knowledge and experience in the areas they inspect. Inspection teams normally include at least one member from outside the world of education and a nominated member of staff from the college being inspected.

GRADE DESCRIPTORS

The procedures for assessing quality are described in the Council Circular 93/28. In the course of inspecting colleges, inspectors assess the strengths and weaknesses of each aspect of provision they inspect. Their assessments are set out in the reports. They also summarise their judgements on the balance between strengths and weaknesses using a five-point scale. The descriptors for the grades are:

- grade 1 – provision which has many strengths and very few weaknesses*
- grade 2 – provision in which the strengths clearly outweigh the weaknesses*
- grade 3 – provision with a balance of strengths and weaknesses*
- grade 4 – provision in which the weaknesses clearly outweigh the strengths*
- grade 5 – provision which has many weaknesses and very few strengths.*

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FEFC INSPECTION REPORT 68/94

JOSIAH MASON SIXTH FORM COLLEGE

WEST MIDLANDS REGION

Inspected October 1993–April 1994

Summary

Josiah Mason College in North East Birmingham is a well-governed and well-managed sixth form college. It offers GCE A level, AS, GCSE and vocational courses. The teaching staff are well qualified and experienced. They have a good relationship with students, who benefit from the high-quality teaching and effective systems of guidance and tutorial support. There is a good range of provision to support students who require additional teaching, including a language development base. Many students join the college with only modest levels of attainment, but achieve satisfactory and sometimes good GCE A level results. Results in vocational courses are very good. Accommodation is clean, well-maintained, and of a high standard. There is an attractive new library and a well-equipped information technology centre which is heavily used and highly valued by students, who would use it even more if it had longer opening hours. Areas for improvement are the extension of quality assurance to administrative and support areas; increased provision for adult learners; the development of mechanisms for identifying local employers' needs; and more co-ordination between library and teaching staff.

The grades awarded as a result of the inspection are given below.

Aspects of cross-college provision		Grade
Responsiveness and range of provision		2
Governance and management		1
Students' recruitment, guidance and support		1
Quality assurance		2
Resources:	staffing	2
	equipment/learning resources	2
	accommodation	2

Curriculum area	Grade	Curriculum area	Grade
Mathematics	2	Art and design	3
Science	1		
Business studies	2	Humanities	2
		English & communications	2
Health and social care	2		

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INTRODUCTION

1 Josiah Mason Sixth Form College, Birmingham, was inspected during Autumn 1993 and Spring 1994. The college's enrolment and induction procedures were inspected at the beginning of the college term. Specialist subject areas were inspected in November 1993 and in February 1994, and aspects of cross-college provision from 19-22 April 1994. Six full-time and eight part-time inspectors took part in the inspection, spending a total of 50 inspector days in the college.

2 The team inspected courses in business studies, humanities, health and social care, mathematics, art and design, science, English and communications. They visited 91 classes, examined representative samples of students' work, and held discussions with governors, staff and students. They also met representatives of local employers, parents and the community, and a representative of the local training and enterprise council (TEC).

3 The inspection was carried out according to the framework and guidelines described in Council circular 93/28. The framework describes a four-year cycle. When this cycle becomes fully established colleges will have the opportunity to respond to the findings of earlier inspection reports before the quadrennial inspection and the subsequent report. As the inspection of Josiah Mason Sixth Form College occurred early in the cycle, the opportunity for such a response was not available.

THE COLLEGE AND ITS AIMS

4 Josiah Mason College in north east Birmingham was established as a sixth form college in 1983 as part of a reorganisation of schools in Birmingham. Its buildings, formerly those of two technical schools, were constructed in 1959-60. The college operates on one site, four miles from the centre of Birmingham. The two buildings are linked by a leisure centre. Use is made of a sports field at Short Heath, a mile from the college.

5 The college primarily serves the north of the city of Birmingham. It provides a range of further education courses for full-time 16-19 year old students and it is beginning to develop part-time courses and courses for adults. It employs 82 teaching staff, of whom 64 are full-time. There are 18 support staff. A profile of the teaching and support staff, expressed as full-time equivalents, is shown in figure 1. At the time of the inspection, there were 1,131 enrolments, 952 of them full time. Enrolments by age and level of study are shown in figures 2 and 3. Full-time student numbers by curriculum area are given in figure 4. The college has a rich cultural mix. Sixty five per cent of the students are from ethnic minority backgrounds. The college's estimated income for 1993-94 is about £3.1 million, 95 per cent of which is allocated by the FEFC. In 1992-93, the college's unit of funding as recorded in the FEFC report, *Funding Allocations 1993-94*, was £2,642 for each full-time equivalent student. This compares with a median of £2,647 for former sixth form colleges.

Summaries of the college's estimated income and expenditure for 1993-94 are shown in figures 5 and 6.

6 Post-16 students are recruited from over 100 schools and colleges. There are two further education colleges nearby. There are also three other sixth form colleges in the city, another six further education colleges and a range of grammar and comprehensive schools for 11 to 18 year olds.

7 Teaching is organised within six faculties based on distinct areas of work: business and computing; community and behavioural studies; humanities; language and literature; mathematics and science; and creative arts. Each faculty offers a range of General Certificate of Education advanced level (GCE A level) courses, General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) courses, General National Vocational Qualifications (GNVQs) and other vocational courses.

8 The city of Birmingham has a mixed economy with a long manufacturing history. Over the past 15 years, traditional manufacturing and construction industries have contracted sharply while service industries have expanded. The unemployment rate in wards adjacent to the college are higher than the Birmingham city average. The college's mission is to serve the community by providing open access to a comprehensive range of high quality further education and training opportunities with particular emphasis upon full-time 16-19 provision, and to manage resources efficiently and effectively.

RESPONSIVENESS AND RANGE OF PROVISION

9 The college offers a wide choice of GCSE and GCE A level courses. There are 34 GCE A level and 27 GCSE subjects. There are also a small number of Business Technology Education Council (BTEC) courses. Four courses are provided at BTEC first level and two at BTEC national level. The college has started to broaden its range of courses and it now runs General National Vocational Qualifications (GNVQs). There are four GNVQ foundation level courses, three at intermediate level and three at advanced level. The Nursery Nursing Education Board (NNEB) Diploma is offered. The college has been invited by City and Guilds London Institute (CGLI) to pilot new GNVQs in information technology at foundation and intermediate level. The introduction of GNVQ advanced science is also planned.

10 The college's strategic plan includes the development of vocational courses. Plans are well advanced for setting up a National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) in business administration at intermediate level. A certificate course in child care and education is to be launched soon. The presence of a large number of television and radio companies in the Birmingham area has encouraged the college to expand recruitment to the CGLI certificate in television and media studies. Good links with Birmingham Cable have helped in planning and preparing this initiative.

11 At present the college has small numbers of mature students but it is planned to increase these with marketing and further curriculum

developments. When access courses are added to the curriculum, mature students may make a significant contribution.

12 There is also a small number of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. They are fully integrated into the teaching programmes and the college's social activities. Recently, several of these students joined an educational trip to Paris. Representatives from a special school praised college staff for the support they gave the students and the levels of educational achievement they were promoting. The language development base responds to local needs. It makes good provision for students who have recently arrived in this country and helps them to acquire English language skills. It also assists students with limited prior experience of education to become integrated into mainstream courses. The approach is flexible and is designed to ensure individually tailored responses to students' needs.

13 There is a low level of participation in modern foreign languages at GCE A level. The college has introduced a compulsory language in the GNVQ advanced business course. It also makes provision whenever possible for students to obtain GCSE qualifications in a range of community languages.

14 The college is situated in an area of high unemployment but so far it has not ventured into specific courses for unemployed people. To assist in its pursuit of growth targets, the college should strengthen arrangements for identifying local employers' needs, for training courses. The college has good contacts with the Birmingham Education Business Partnership which have led to a useful exchange between the college business faculty and the Benefits Agency. Staff have assisted with training modules, and student projects have focused on various aspects of the agency's work. The college enjoys good relations with Birmingham TEC. There have been discussions of the college's strategic plan and of the potential for launching various new courses. TEC staff have discussed local training needs with college staff and some support has been given towards the training of tutors for GNVQ courses. To date, the TEC has not funded any major new courses at the college.

15 Religious studies is available as an examination course at both GCSE and GCE A level. Two rooms are set aside for prayer and a Christian Union meets weekly, but the college does not provide a weekly act of collective worship. Consequently, the college fails to satisfy the requirement of the Further and Higher Education Act, 1992.

16 Local schools have been an important source of recruitment for the college and effective liaison arrangements have been developed to maintain close contact. College staff regularly visit certain local schools and there are plans to develop franchise arrangements with some of them. The college is also developing the use of compacts and is currently evaluating their benefits in a pilot arrangement with two neighbouring schools.

17 The college markets its services effectively. Its publicity material is well conceived and well designed and its marketing strategy is appropriate. There have been changes to the marketing committee to assist the college in setting goals and in monitoring progress. The main strategic priority is to keep and strengthen the good links with local schools. There is an appreciation that a wider student base and the new courses to be offered will require the college to re-assess its marketing. The college keeps a record of enquiries and has recently computerised its market research. This will help it to monitor the level of demand for courses during the main recruitment period. It is envisaged that the system will enable managers to respond quickly and effectively to the latest trends in potential enrolments on each course.

GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT

18 This is a well-governed and well-managed college. The governing body has a highly committed and high calibre membership. There are 19 members of the corporation including the principal. Ten members, holding senior positions in local, national and international organisations, are drawn from commercial and industrial backgrounds. They have expertise in audit, finance, law, marketing, personnel, and in planning provision for people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. One member represents the Birmingham TEC. Three co-opted governors have experience of estates management, higher education, and training within a social services department. There are also two staff governors and a student representative. In support of the student governor, a second student has been invited to attend as an observer. There is currently a vacancy for a parent governor. To date, the governing body has only one representative from an ethnic minority group but governors are mindful of the need to increase representation when vacancies arise.

19 Four standing committees have been established to reflect the functions and mission of the college: finance and general purposes; audit; remuneration; and curriculum. Governors also play an active part in appropriate internal college committees, including health and safety and marketing, and have had a high-profile representation at parents' evenings and open days. They have close involvement with college staff and have used their professional expertise to support curriculum development, for example in helping to assess business plans for GNVQ business students. The curriculum committee has conducted two fact-finding reviews: one on curriculum provision and the other on academic support services. They have produced excellent reports to be presented to the full governing body.

20 Governors display a strong sense of common purpose and make clear decisions which are carefully minuted. They monitor their performance against statutory requirements and have established the necessary financial and personnel procedures. Attendance at governing body meetings is good, averaging more than 80 per cent. Governors have attended a wide range of training events, including courses organised by

the local education authority (LEA) in preparation for incorporation. All new governors are provided with a useful briefing pack.

21 The senior management team of the college comprises the principal, vice-principal and six assistant principals, all of whom are also senior tutors, the director of quality, and a representative of the faculty board. The management structure is organised into six faculties for the line management of academic staff, and curriculum management is also shared by 25 team leaders in charge of subjects and/or programme levels and vocational programmes. A number of staff hold cross-curricular responsibilities.

22 The principal gives strong and sympathetic leadership, setting clear objectives and targets. She works closely with the vice-principal to ensure sound day-to-day management and the monitoring of performance against longer-term targets. There is a strong corporate ethos in the college, to which senior and middle management make an essential contribution. Staff at all levels feel they have a significant part to play in the well-being of the college and its students.

23 The strategic plan was produced after full consultation with members of the governing body and staff. The conversion of strategic goals into tactical and operational needs is linked to the production and review of faculty and course plans, which both inform and are informed by, the overall strategic plan and mission statement. There is understanding among staff of the general direction of college policy and the detailed targets relating to their own areas of work. The effectiveness of communications within the college are ensured through a system of regular meetings, including a weekly staff briefing, and the production and wide circulation of bulletins and minutes of meetings.

24 The college has established sound policies on equal opportunities, student support and health and safety. The implementation of these policies is monitored effectively, through meetings of cross-college groups, student surveys and the production of various reports.

25 The college has a number of computerised management information systems, some of which have been bought and others which have been developed in-house. In addition to financial management they include systems for recording applications and enrolments, monitoring attendance and retention rates, and managing the assessment, recording and reporting systems. A number of reports and performance indicators can be produced and these are increasingly and effectively used to inform and support the management and administration systems of the college. They have good potential to underpin a college-wide management information system. Already there are some links between the curriculum and management information networks. There is as yet limited access to, and use of, the system by college managers other than those directly involved in its operation.

26 Unit costs have been analysed at the level of individual classes, using the model in the Audit Commission/Office for Standards in Education report, *Unfinished Business*. The college plans to refine the model to incorporate FEFC funding. The results of the current unit cost exercise are used in discussion with faculty heads to agree the future curriculum to be offered. Enrolment targets are set both in terms of broad programme areas and courses, and the achievement or otherwise of these targets is also used to help plan the future curriculum. The college is well aware of the importance of achieving its target numbers. The use of these performance indicators, together with the monitoring of student-staff ratios and retention rates, is helping the college to plan realistically to achieve its key aims. These aims include increasing student participation rates; access and achievement; maintaining the quality of teaching in response to identified needs; and reducing costs.

STUDENTS' RECRUITMENT, GUIDANCE AND SUPPORT

27 There is a firm commitment to provide appropriate learning and personal support and guidance for each student. To support this, the college has clear policies and well- documented procedures.

28 The college has a programme of information and recruitment events, including school visits, careers fairs, open days and faculty taster days. The science faculty has been innovative in providing schools with a simple audio-visual display about the department on computer disk. The college is a member of the Birmingham pre-16 compact and is piloting the post-16 compact.

29 There is a central admissions system which operates effectively. There are clear recruitment and advisory policies and procedures which are well communicated throughout the college. All students, both full and part-time, are interviewed to ensure they join a course appropriate to their aspirations. The record of achievement forms an important part of the recruitment process. Additional careers advice is provided where appropriate. Students were confident that the guidance and advice had allowed them to make informed choices. The applications process is monitored and evaluated taking an appropriate sample of student interviews each year.

30 The college has recently begun recruiting a small number of adults. A high percentage leave before the course is completed. The reasons for this are being monitored and appear varied. It should be ensured that during enrolment, adult students are given advice and guidance on the commitment required to successfully complete the course.

31 The assessment and accreditation of prior learning and experience is in the early stages of development. Staff are aware of the commitment to develop it, but as yet have only a modest understanding of the implications. There is formal assessment of some new students to identify those who might have learning difficulties, and a group has been established to consider ways of extending this.

32 Students follow a well-planned and comprehensive induction programme. This incorporates a full introduction to the college, the faculty and the course. Students felt that the programme helped them to settle quickly into their new environment and course of study. The programme was particularly valued by science and business studies students. There is a comprehensive college handbook for students. In addition, some faculties provide a handbook which gives further information about faculty staff and resources. Students are assisted by course materials which detail fully the content of the course, options, requirements, assessment methods, and general information.

33 Each student has a learner agreement which they and their college tutor sign. Students are advised of their rights and responsibilities through the college induction programme and the students' handbook. There are efficient channels for the representation of students' views through the students' union. The union has members serving on several college committees and a student governor.

34 A youth worker organises events each lunch time, and there is a range of extra curricular activities which include cultural, drama, and other special events, and overseas visits.

35 The tutorial system is well organised and very effective. It provides a system of group and individual support, on a systematic basis. Students have a thorough and well-prepared interview with their tutor every half-term. Based on regular assessment, the interview is used to review progress and to agree actions to be taken. All programmes of study include a daily opportunity to gain assistance from tutors. The system is well documented, and staff guidance is provided. Students are encouraged to maintain their personal record of achievement, and opportunities are provided for them to do so. Mature students and part-time students participate in the same tutorial process as full-time students. There is a staffed information desk, and a counsellor has recently been appointed. Students in all faculties spoke highly of the support they receive and of the information and help available.

36 The procedure for monitoring attendance is effective. It is known that absences will be followed up, and where appropriate, will be reported to parents promptly. An analysis of attendance patterns and retention rates is carried out continuously, using computer-based systems.

37 There is a good range of provision to support students requiring additional teaching in English, mathematics, humanities, science and business studies and language development. The John Canavan drop in information technology centre provides students with additional learning support and access to the latest computer technology.

38 All students have an entitlement to careers advice and guidance. The up-to-date careers library provides an attractive and friendly environment. There are effective links with the careers service who attend the centre two or three mornings every week, providing ample provision to meet current demands.

39 The relationship between college staff and students is good. Staff show a committed, caring and supportive attitude to all students, and readily assist outside the teaching periods. Students, parents and local school representatives praised highly the caring, accessible and supportive environment provided by the college.

TEACHING AND THE PROMOTION OF LEARNING

40 The teaching and learning observed were of a consistently high standard. There were numerous examples of good practice. Overall there were many more strengths than weaknesses. In almost all the classes seen the management of learning was effective and students were challenged to extend their knowledge and understanding.

41 The following table shows the grades awarded for the teaching sessions inspected:

Teaching sessions: inspection grades by programme of study

Programmes	Grade	1	2	3	4	5	Totals
GCE A/AS level		19	22	5	1	0	47
GCSE		6	4	4	0	0	14
GNVQ		1	11	5	0	0	17
Other		2	4	7	0	0	13
Total		28	41	21	1	0	91

42 For most courses there are detailed teaching schemes which express clear aims and objectives. A number of schemes set out the teaching and learning methods and assessment procedures to be followed. Appropriate documentation is produced and students are made well aware of the demands of the course and the assessment criteria by which their performance will be judged.

43 In science, the curriculum is exceptionally well planned and supported by professionally produced documentation: all students receive teaching schemes and topic plans. The newly-introduced BTEC science first diploma course would benefit from further development to increase its vocational relevance. In the GCE A level mathematics programme, flexibility is assured through use of a modular syllabus. In health and social care, students receive clear instructions about their contribution to classes and the assignments to be completed.

44 Staff maintain up-to-date records and keep students informed about their progress. Students and their parents expressed high levels of satisfaction with the system for reporting progress. They receive regular and detailed reports, with opportunities to discuss them in detail and to set targets for future action. The college has developed a comprehensive and coherent approach to the recording of achievement. This is supported by use of computerised and integrated recording and reporting systems to support the provision of national records of achievement for all students.

45 Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are integrated into mainstream courses and receive substantial support. There are additional timetabled sessions in a number of curriculum areas and much evidence of class-based support for students with hearing impairment and/or language development needs. The college employs a full-time care assistant who supports individual students in the classroom. There is good access to classrooms and laboratories for wheelchair users.

46 Lessons were consistently well planned and well managed. The work was at an appropriate standard and conducted at a brisk pace, with high but realistic expectations. Students were supported and challenged. Teachers had a good grasp of their subject and were skilled at providing a range of teaching and learning methods to develop both subject knowledge and core skills.

47 A GCE A level history class on the cold war division of Germany was meticulously planned and structured. In addition to developing students' historical concepts and understanding of historical terminology, the teacher proved adept at using every opportunity to build language skills and improve general levels of oracy. A GCSE English class on a set text was an excellent example of mixed-ability teaching in which students worked effectively to a clearly-set task, aided by effective questioning and supervision from their teacher.

48 A wide range of teaching strategies was deployed, often accompanied by skilful use of a variety of teaching aids, including information technology. In art and design, students were using information technology as a natural extension for studio work. In a GCE A level mathematics class, the relationships in trigonometry were proved analytically and generated on the computer screen. Students were then given the opportunity to explore the value of this relationship in the solution of a range of problems.

49 In a small number of classes, the quality of teaching and learning was adversely affected by weaknesses in planning. Objectives were unclear and the pace of learning suffered. The late arrival or absence of students was also a problem in a few classes. Some very small groups were observed in English and business studies. The college has made a start on developing open and flexible learning with a pilot group of distance learning students; this could usefully be extended to help with provision in the areas where groups are small.

50 In a few cases, students were allowed to sit through a class without undertaking any meaningful learning. In some art and design classes, more opportunities were needed to develop students' creative design thinking, critical awareness and powers of oral expression. In some classes in business studies and humanities, there was over-emphasis on a narrow range of study skills, leading to routine and mechanical activities.

51 Changes of staff in mid-course had caused problems of continuity in a small number of classes but almost all teachers were skilled at motivating and enthusing students, drawing high levels of commitment through their

own friendly and supportive but rigorous approach. The best lessons were characterised by high levels of class interaction and student participation. In many classes students were encouraged to take initiatives and to plan their assignments.

52 Assignments set were at an appropriate and realistic standard and usually to a timetable which was made clear to students. They were carefully and accurately graded and returned to students in good time, often accompanied by extensive feedback. The tasks were clear. Assignment cover sheets and standardised project briefs were used to good effect in a number of subjects; in science a particularly notable feature was the students' use of cover sheets to evaluate their own work.

STUDENTS' ACHIEVEMENTS

53 Students enjoy their studies. In most cases, they are well motivated, responsive and keen to learn. Most show a high level of commitment to their courses, applying themselves well in class, even when they find their studies challenging. This was particularly noticeable in science, where the majority of students in GCE A level classes commenced study at the college with fewer than five GCSE passes at grade A-C, some with no passes, yet clearly enjoyed their work, and in many cases had realistic plans to continue study of a science subject to degree level.

54 Staff expectations of students are high yet realistic, bearing in mind that well over a third of current GCE A level students first followed a GCSE retake course. In almost all subjects, the levels of knowledge are appropriate: there is a good understanding of concepts in science, and the innovative approach in physics allows students to choose modules relating to their own special interests. Humanities students understand methodology, practical skills and techniques; social care students apply their learning to the everyday scenario they are asked to analyse, and their projects are expertly presented. Practical work in art and design, particularly on vocational courses, is not always accompanied by an appropriate level of knowledge, understanding and critical awareness.

55 In many subject areas, students have the opportunity to participate in group work. Social care students co-operate strongly, are mutually supportive and work effectively in teams. The topic of digestion was introduced in biology by a poster session, each student contributing one section of the work. These posters, of extremely high quality, were then integrated into the other laboratory display material. In a GCE A level English literature class, students worked in groups on four drafts of Wilfred Owen's poem: 'Anthem to Doomed Youth', comparing each draft to show development of the poem. The sensitive teaching developed students' critical abilities and use of language.

56 Organisation, management and attention to health and safety in all practical science sessions was very high. Individual sets of molecular models were used in organic chemistry practicals to help students interpret their observations. On frequent occasions their practical work was applied

to everyday topics and recent media articles. There is practical work of high quality in GCE A level art. Students show sound craft skills, and some of the experimental work produced by three-dimensional design students is visually stimulating and well produced.

57 A substantial number of students for whom English is not their first language achieve significant success. Teachers of humanities are particularly adept at developing study skills, including oracy, as a part of their teaching. A limited range of study and core skills are developed in GCE A level business studies. The lack of numerical ability caused some GCE A level mathematics and science students difficulty and reflected their previous modest levels of attainment. Seen in the light of this, their achievements are all the more impressive. Students make extensive use of the modern information technology facilities, and show considerable skills in handling applications packages. Art and design students use information technology as a natural extension of studio project work.

58 Teachers have good records of student assessments. Students receive a regular summary of their progress and are able to make realistic comments about the level of their attainments. Much written work, both homework and course work, is of high quality. In social care, students who produce weaker work are given every encouragement to raise their standards and often pass at a second attempt.

59 The pass rate at GCE A level has increased steadily over the last three years, from 66 per cent of candidates entered in 1991, achieving grade A-E, to 75 per cent in 1993. This compares with an average pass rate of 77 per cent for all schools and colleges and 82 per cent for sixth form colleges nationally. The main reason for the differences was the modern language results, which were much lower than in 1992, with only four out of 24 candidates passing. All students passed in art, and results in biology, 83 per cent, business studies, 94 per cent, and mathematics, 81 per cent, were significantly above national averages for these subjects.

60 Pass rates at GCE AS level have increased from 39 per cent of candidates entered in 1991, achieving grade A-E, to 64 per cent in 1993. This is the same as the overall pass rate for all schools and colleges and compares with the figure of 72 per cent for sixth form colleges. However, numbers entered are very small, 42, in a total of eight subjects, and only 36 students actually sat the examinations.

61 Higher grade results need to be considered in the light of the abilities and prior attainments of candidates. At GCE A level 29 per cent of candidates entered achieved grade A-C, and at GCE AS level 21 per cent. These are well below national averages, but 1993 results showed significant 'value added' in many subjects, including several where A-C grade passes were below national average figures. Proportions of higher grades were particularly high in art, 52 per cent, economics, 51 per cent, and performing arts, 66 per cent. Overall, GCE A level results, together with value-added information, indicate the strengths of many departments

in enabling their students, from a variety of socio-economic backgrounds, to achieve the results they do.

62 Percentages of students entered for GCSE, achieving grades A-C, are low, 36 per cent compared with a national average for schools and colleges of 50 per cent, and there is a high drop-out rate in English and mathematics. This should be improved by the new 1993-94 admissions policy which imposes a realistic minimum entry level for these courses. Numbers of students starting GCSE courses have decreased dramatically partly as a result of the increased number of vocational courses available.

63 Results in vocational subjects at intermediate level are good. All of the students enrolled in GNVQ business studies, health and social care, and leisure and tourism succeeded in obtaining passes, as did 96 per cent of students on BTEC first courses.

64 There is a slightly lower retention rate of students on vocational courses: this was 85 per cent from November 1993 - April 1994, compared with 88 per cent of students on other courses. Ninety-three per cent of BTEC national business and finance students enrolled achieved passes and 75 per cent of them progressed to higher education. Destinations of around a third of 1993 leavers were unknown, but 45 per cent of those whose destinations are known progressed to higher education, and only 8 per cent were unemployed, in an area with 18 per cent unemployment.

QUALITY ASSURANCE

65 The college has recently agreed a quality assurance policy based on a recognition that it needs to have systems and guiding principles. These aim to ensure that it delivers the best possible services to meet its customers' requirements. The policy emphasizes the importance of having a systematic course review process; good customer care; planned staff development; and a common sense of purpose.

66 The course review process is systematic and well focused. Course teams are required to set down their key improvement targets for the forthcoming year and decide on responsibilities, review dates and success criteria. Some of these targets are also included in faculty plans, and when this happens monitoring is carried out during faculty review meetings. Course leaders review progress on the remaining targets.

67 Diverse attempts have been made to obtain students' views and their perceptions of the college and of the courses studied. Formal questionnaires have been used to gather information on the attitudes of mature students; to monitor induction; to examine the students' perceptions of the John Canavan Centre; to obtain a broad view of students' opinions on cross-college facilities; and to seek feedback from premature leavers. Each course team has been free to devise its own approach to gathering students' views of teaching. In some cases, feedback was collected informally and there was limited recording of comments.

68 The systems for assuring quality have largely related to teaching activity; little progress has been made with setting up quality assurance for support services or management functions.

69 Performance indicators have been introduced for some aspects of the college's work. Each course team receives data on course results and makes comments on action needed. The college has recently set realistic targets for retention of students and for examination success.

70 Staff development is carefully planned. A staff development committee oversees the system which is based on each individual's own aspirations, matched to the college's staff development priorities. Last year the key priorities were carefully selected to take into account the incorporation process and curriculum developments within the college. Spending on staff development is nominally £25,000 for a 16 month period. This figure significantly understates the large amount of uncosted time and other resources invested in training staff. Training days, such as the highly successful special needs day, and time remission for staff development add substantially to the commitment of the college to developing its human resources. Staff development is monitored using the Staff Development Management System. A limitation of the staff development programme was that at the time of the inspection it had not produced sufficient staff with lead body qualifications in assessment.

71 The appraisal of staff has begun with the principal. Further appraisals will follow though they will be treated as a pilot up to September 1994. After that a mainstream programme of appraisals will start and all staff will be appraised by September 1996.

RESOURCES

72 In the FEFC report, *Funding Allocations 1993-94*, the college's unit of funding for 1992-93, inherited from the LEA was recorded as £2,642 per weighted full-time equivalent student. The median for sixth form colleges was £2,647.

73 Ninety-five per cent of college funding is received from the FEFC. A small income is obtained from leisure, training and other contracts.

74 Allocation of resources is largely determined by student enrolments and the number of teaching sessions delivered. College-wide developments are centrally funded.

Staffing

75 Teaching staff are highly committed, academically well qualified and experienced. Most have professional teaching qualifications. A number, including almost all of the science department, are assistant or chief examiners in their subject. Approximately 30 per cent of staff have worked in relevant vocational areas; for some, and particularly those involved in delivering vocational courses, this experience needs updating in modern business, commercial or professional practice. The college is pursuing a

policy of increasing the number of part-time staff in order to provide particular vocational specialisms. The current lack of part-time staffing in business studies may compromise future flexibility in delivering vocational courses.

76 Although the principal, one assistant principal and one head of faculty are female, women are under-represented in senior posts. Ethnic minority groups are also under-represented on the staff, especially in view of the high proportion of students from these groups. The college is well aware of these issues and is addressing them. Current work on implementing the college's equal opportunities policy includes consideration of the role of staff recruitment and staff development procedures in encouraging greater representation of groups which are currently under-represented.

77 A key feature of the college's developing personnel policy is that all staff, administrative, teaching and technical, are included in briefings, consultation and staff development. The administrative and technical staff provide effective support. A major principle of the personnel policy has been to establish the concept of a 'single staff', which includes teaching, administrative and technical staff. Where technician support has been less than might be expected, the college has recently made a part-time appointment to fill the need. Support services to help integrate students with special learning needs are well used in a number of curriculum areas.

Equipment/ learning resources

78 The college's outstanding commitment to the importance of information technology for all staff and students is demonstrated by its computer ratio of one per 4.6 students. The information technology hardware is located in numerous locations including central access facilities, classrooms, laboratories and learning resources rooms. Many of these information technology facilities are networked.

79 The John Canavan information technology learning centre is extremely well resourced with the latest personal computer hardware, software and computer peripherals. This centre has been refurbished to a high standard, and provides an attractive, welcoming and accessible information technology environment which is highly valued by students. Its success in attracting students means that at certain times the facilities are unable to cope with demand. The college may wish to consider longer opening hours to alleviate this.

80 The library is new and provides an excellent learning environment which is well used and much appreciated by the students.

81 The book stock is just adequate to meet the demands of students. The business studies book stock levels need further expansion to meet demand especially when students are undertaking assignment work. Many new books added to stock are held on reference only which restricts usage. The number of learning videos is limited and the library has no audio-cassette facilities to support individual learning. All students receive their own text book for each major subject they are studying.

82 Funding to the library to improve the number of new books has been significantly increased recently. A replacement and development funding policy is being devised for the library and should be operational for the new academic year. Faculties have their own stock of specialist learning resources which are available to students. More co-ordination between the teachers and library staff would improve the learning support facilities.

83 In creative art, the quality of the refurbishment and the investment in new equipment is of a good standard.

84 The number of teaching aids throughout the college is adequate and such aids are of a suitable standard to support the present range of provision.

85 The college is starting to develop formal management systems to provide an effective and efficient method of equipment replacement. In time, these management systems will supplement the planned maintenance and investment programmes being addressed in the accommodation strategy.

Accommodation

86 The college shares the site with a leisure centre and a secondary school. The three-storey buildings are of traditional construction and were partly refurbished in 1983 when the college was formed. The fabric of the building is good.

87 The teaching accommodation is clean, well maintained and of a high standard in all humanities, sciences, learning centres and media studies. The John Canavan Centre and the library are of exceptionally high standard. Most of the accommodation is suitable for the courses and programmes of study in size and layout. The college is well provided with specialist accommodation and, in many cases, with adjoining staff workrooms or resource centres. Arrangements have been made to provide accommodation for private prayer.

88 The floor finishes for most rooms are good, many having carpet or hardwood blocks. The decoration and furnishings are satisfactory and support the learning environment. Various classrooms and learning centres have good, stimulating wall displays.

89 Access for students with restricted mobility is good in most of the college, especially in the south building where a lift is provided. A new lift is planned to allow wheelchair users access to most floors in the north block.

90 Staff and students have commented critically on the poor standard of catering provided. The college is undertaking a full review of its catering facilities with the aid of a catering specialist.

91 The college has a large provision of teaching accommodation which is not being used to optimum effect at present. It lacks private facilities for careers interviews. The college has recently undertaken two projects: the

conversion of a gymnasium to form a library, and a hall converted to a resource centre. These projects have created good use of large spaces. Despite these improvements the college still has excess space capacity. Most of the accommodation facilities are not used by the college in the evening. An accommodation strategy is being developed with the advice of building consultants which will incorporate methods of achieving effective and efficient use of space.

CONCLUSIONS AND ISSUES

92 The college is making good progress towards fulfilling its aim to serve the community by providing open access to a comprehensive range of high quality further education and training opportunities, with emphasis upon full-time 16-19 provision. Particular strengths of the provision inspected are:

- the effective governance and management
- good standards of teaching
- the well-organised tutorial support for all students
- well-qualified staff, who have a good relationship with students
- effective guidance and support for all students, including students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities
- the range of additional teaching support including language development
- a high standard of accommodation, particularly the library and the excellent information technology resource centre
- good results in vocational courses.

93 The college recognises it should address the following issues in order to improve the quality of its provision:

- limited provision for adult learners
- relatively undeveloped mechanisms for identifying the needs of local employers
- the extension of quality assurance to administrative and support staff
- the development of accreditation of prior learning
- extension of opening hours at peak times in the information technology resource centre
- the lack of private facilities for careers interviews
- catering
- co-ordination of library and teaching staff.

FIGURES

1 Staff profile - staff expressed as full-time equivalents (1993-94)

2 Percentage enrolments by age (1993-94)

3 Percentage enrolments by level of study (1993-94)

4 Full-time students by curriculum area (1993-94)

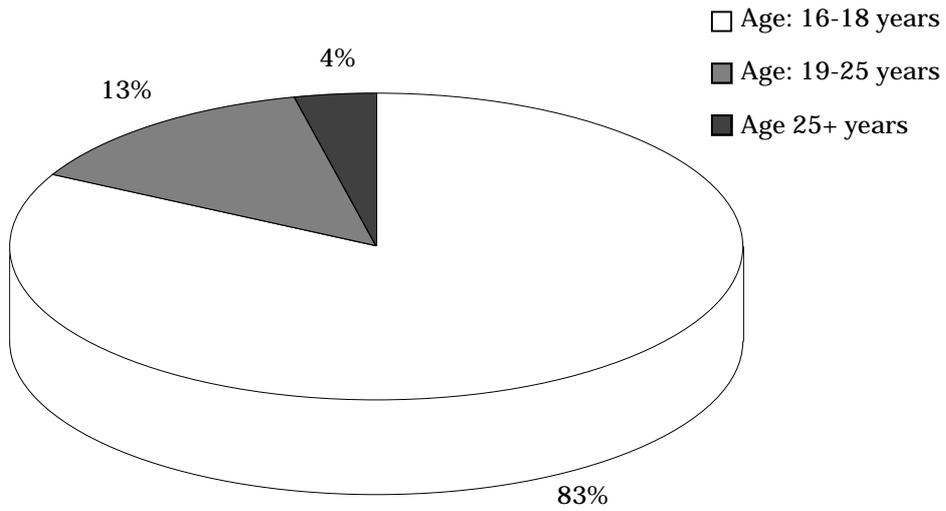
5 Estimated income (1993-94)

6 Estimated expenditure (1993-94)

Note: the information contained in the figures was provided by the college to the inspection team.

Figure 1

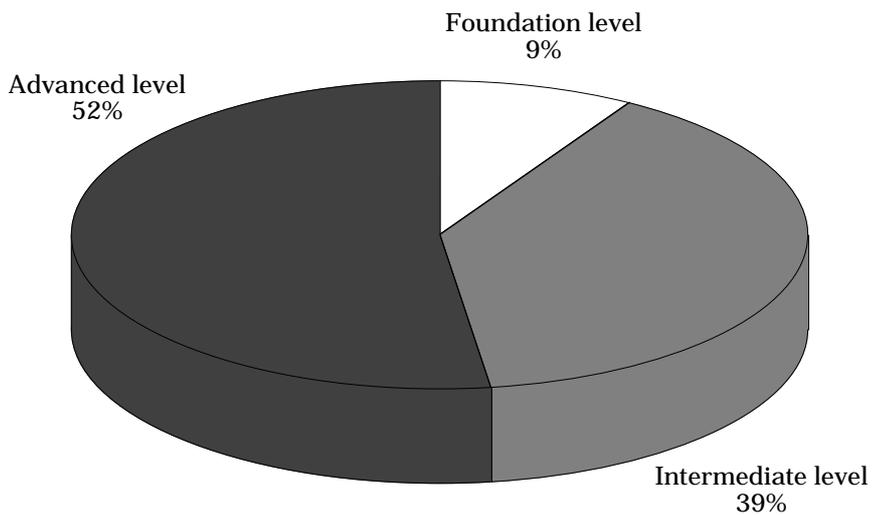
Josiah Mason College: percentage enrolments by age (1993-94)



Enrolments: 1,131

Figure 2

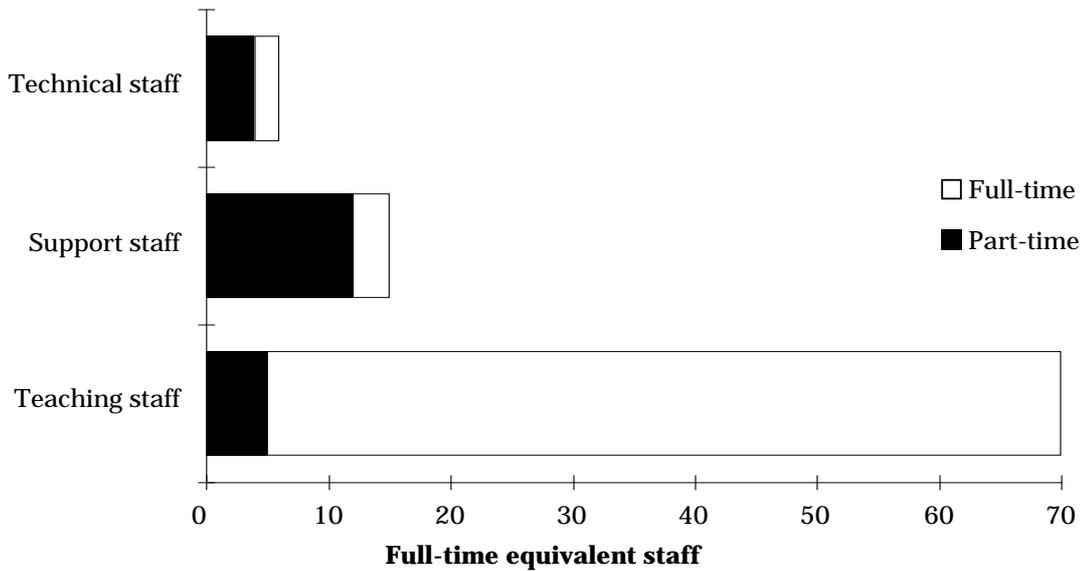
Josiah Mason College: percentage enrolments by level of study (1993-94)



Enrolments: 1,131

Figure 3

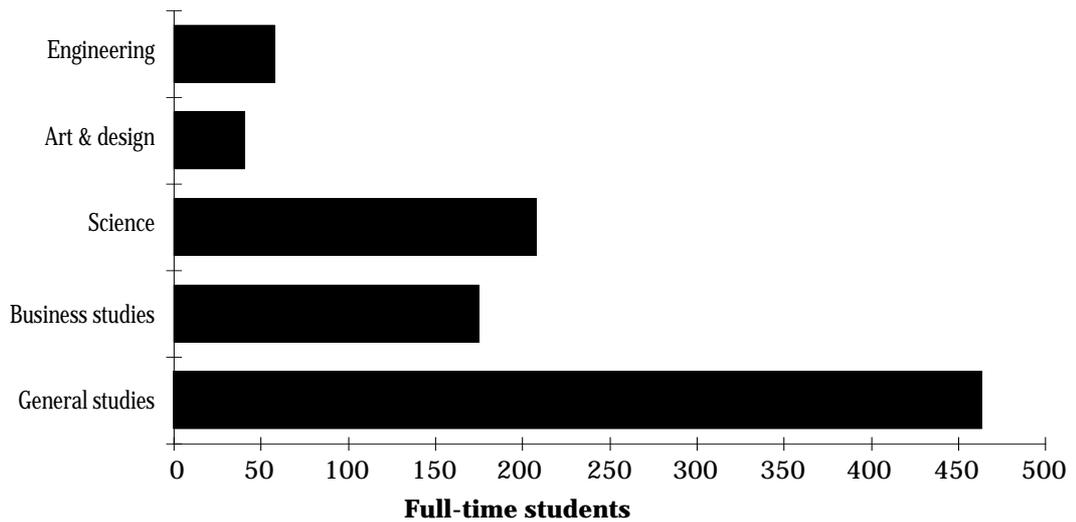
Josiah Mason College: staff profile – staff expressed as full-time equivalents (1993-94)



Full-time equivalent staff: 91

Figure 4

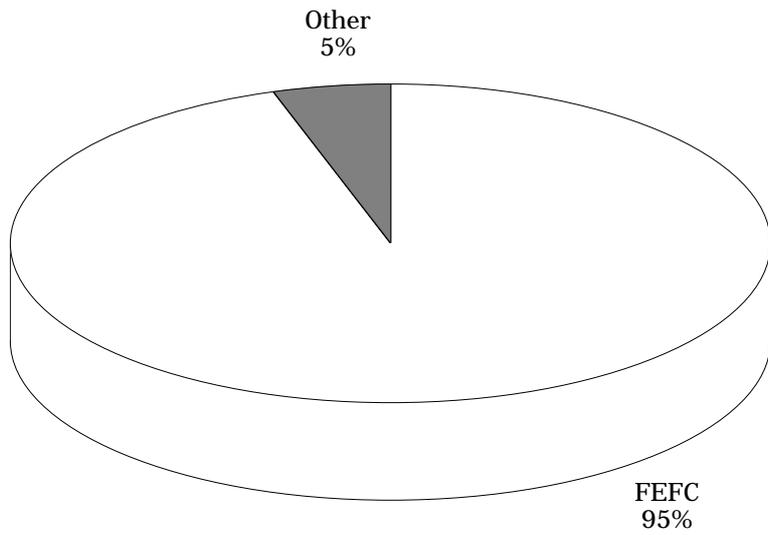
Josiah Mason College: full-time students by curriculum area (1993-94)



Full-time students: 952

Figure 5

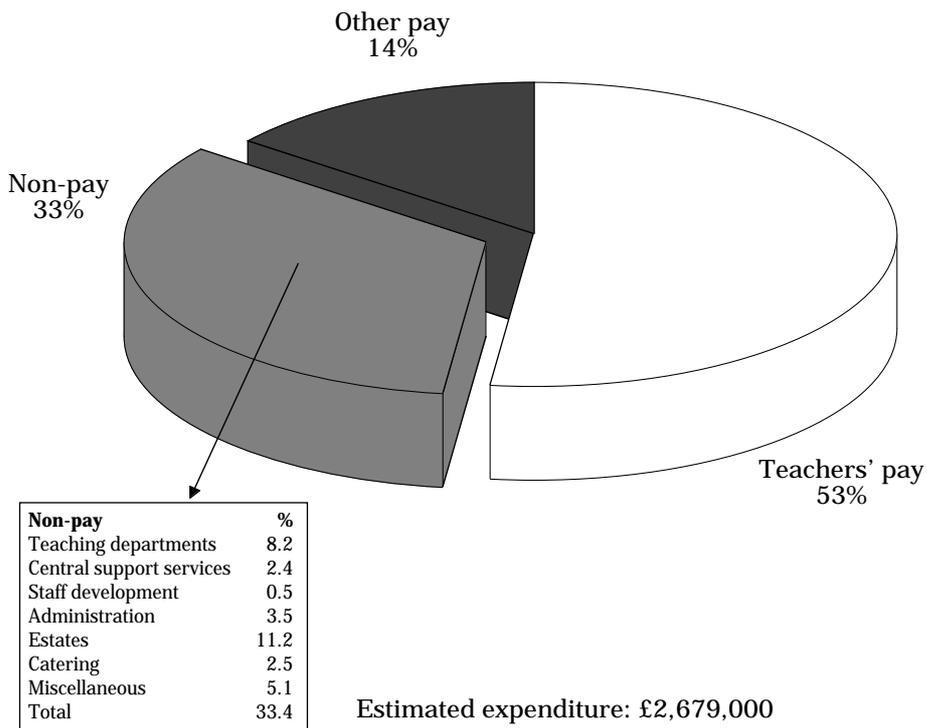
Josiah Mason College: estimated income (1993-94)



Estimated income: £3,128,000

Figure 6

Josiah Mason College: estimated expenditure (1993-94)



Estimated expenditure: £2,679,000

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