

# **Josiah Mason Sixth Form College**

**REPORT FROM  
THE INSPECTORATE  
1997-98**

**THE  
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EDUCATION  
FUNDING  
COUNCIL**

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FUNDING COUNCIL***

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## College statistics

## Grade Descriptors

Inspectors assess the strengths and weaknesses of each aspect of provision they inspect. Their assessments are set out in the report. They use a five-point scale to summarise the balance between strengths and weaknesses.

The descriptors for the grades are:

- grade 1 – outstanding provision which has many strengths and few weaknesses
- grade 2 – good provision in which the strengths clearly outweigh the weaknesses
- grade 3 – satisfactory provision with strengths but also some weaknesses
- grade 4 – less than satisfactory provision in which the weaknesses clearly outweigh the strengths
- grade 5 – poor provision which has few strengths and many weaknesses.

Aggregated grades for aspects of cross-college provision, curriculum areas and lesson observations, for colleges inspected during 1996-97, are shown in the following table.

	Grade				
	1	2	3	4	5
	%	%	%	%	%
Curriculum areas	9	59	30	2	–
Cross-college provision	18	51	27	4	–
Lesson observations	19	42	31	7	1

Source: *Quality and Standards in Further Education in England 1996-97: Chief inspector's annual report.* Grades were awarded using the guidelines in Council Circular 93/28, *Assessing Achievement*.  
Sample size: 122 college inspections

## Retention and Pass Rates

Where data on students' achievements appear in tables, levels of achievement are shown in two ways:

- as a retention rate, which is the proportion of students who completed a course in relation to the number enrolled on 1 November in the first year of the course
- as a pass rate, which is the proportion of students which passed examinations in relation to the number entered. Pass rates for GCE A level are quoted for grades A to E unless otherwise specified. Pass rates for GCSE courses are quoted for grade C or above unless otherwise specified. Pass rates for vocational and professional awards are for successful completion of the full award.

# Summary

## Josiah Mason Sixth Form College

### *West Midlands Region*

#### Inspected January 1998

Josiah Mason Sixth Form College is in Birmingham. The production of the self-assessment report involved governors and all staff. A working group was set up to oversee the college's rigorous process of assessment. The findings were moderated by senior managers and the final report was approved by the corporation. Inspectors agreed with many of the judgements. Students' achievements were not always comprehensively analysed by the college. Action plans arising from the self-assessment addressed key weaknesses and by the time the inspection took place progress had been made by the college in implementing these plans. The intended outcomes of the plans and the timescales for action were not always clearly defined.

The college's core provision, mainly full-time academic and vocational courses for students aged 16 to 19, has been extended considerably over the last few years to include a wide range of programmes for adults. Significant growth has been achieved in outward collaborative provision across the region. The college's mission is to provide education and training of the highest quality with a full commitment to

national initiatives, for example lifelong and inclusive learning and widening participation. The college gives high priority to providing pastoral support for students. There are close working relationships with schools, the local TEC and other organisations. Some 40 per cent of the college's provision was inspected.

The quality of most lessons observed was good. Arrangements for providing careers guidance and learning support for students, including students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, are effective. Accommodation is well maintained and offers good access for those with restricted mobility. The college has effective systems for collecting students' views on the quality of provision. Governors bring a wide range of expertise which is well used. The management team is effective. Strategic planning is thorough. A number of well-developed strategies promote equal opportunities and increase participation in education among students who previously may not have considered full-time or part-time opportunities in education or training. The college should improve: low retention and achievement rates on a few courses; some weak teaching of key skills; the co-ordination of learning support; some out-of-date computing facilities; the underdeveloped overview of quality assurance activities; some weak course reviews; reporting procedures for outward collaborative provision; and some aspects of financial reporting.

Curriculum area	Grade	Cross-college provision	Grade
Computing	3	Support for students	2
Business studies	2	General resources	2
Art and design	2	Quality assurance	3
English and communications	2	Governance	2
		Management	2

# Context

## The College and its Mission

1 Josiah Mason Sixth Form College was established in 1983 as part of a reorganisation of post-16 education in Birmingham. It is situated in the north-east of the city on one site which it shares with an 11 to 16 school run by the local education authority (LEA) and a leisure centre managed by Birmingham City Council. The college competes with a range of institutions that provide further education. It serves an area with relatively high levels of unemployment. Students are recruited from across the whole city, many from areas of great social and economic disadvantage. During the last two years, outward collaborative provision, mainly in leisure and business studies, has been developed with eight other organisations in the region.

2 Since incorporation, the college has changed considerably. The development of provision for adult students has led to significant growth. The college runs evening and Saturday courses and a range of training programmes that are supported by the European Social Fund and the Birmingham Training and Enterprise Council (TEC). In 1996-97, there were 4,532 students, most of whom were part-time adult students. The college recruits students from a range of cultural backgrounds; 65 per cent of students aged 16 to 19 are from minority ethnic groups.

3 The college offers: general certificate of education advanced level (GCE A level) in 20 subjects; general national vocational qualifications (GNVQs) from entry to advanced levels in nine vocational areas; a range of national vocational qualifications (NVQs); and the general certificate of secondary education (GCSE) in 12 subjects. Courses are also provided in nursery nursing, access to higher education, basic skills, communication, information technology (IT), management and administration. Some higher education

provision, organised with the University of Central England, started in September 1997.

4 The college's mission is to provide education and training of the highest quality. There is commitment to national initiatives, for example lifelong and inclusive learning and widening participation. The college gives a high priority to pastoral support for students. It is expanding provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

5 Teaching is organised within five faculties: creative arts; business and computing; mathematics and science; humanities; and community and behavioural studies. A business training division manages programmes funded commercially and by the TEC. In July 1997, the college employed 110 full-time equivalent staff of whom 55 were support staff.

# Context

## The Inspection

6 The college was inspected in January 1998. The inspection team had previously considered the college's self-assessment report and studied information about the college held by other divisions of the Further Education Funding Council (FEFC). The college submitted data on students' achievements for the three years 1995 to 1997 which were checked by inspectors against primary sources such as class registers and pass lists issued by examining bodies.

7 The college was notified two months before the inspection of the curriculum areas to be inspected. These excluded mathematics, science, manufacturing, health and social care and most humanities provision. The inspection was carried out by seven inspectors who worked for a total of 29 days, and an auditor for four days. The inspection team observed 55 lessons, including three tutorials and a sample of work-based provision, and examined college documents and students' work. Team members held meetings with governors, college staff, parents and students. They also met representatives from local schools, a partner university, community organisations, the local authority, and the TEC.

8 Of the lessons inspected, 71 per cent were rated good or outstanding and 2 per cent were less than satisfactory. This profile compares

favourably with the average for all colleges inspected during 1996-97, according to *Quality and Standards in Further Education in England 1996-97: Chief inspector's annual report*. The average level of attendance was 76 per cent, which compares with an average of 84 per cent for sixth form colleges in 1996-97 according to the same report. The following table shows the grades given to the lessons inspected.

### Lessons: inspection grades by programme of study

Programme	Grade					Totals
	1	2	3	4	5	
GCE A/AS level	3	6	0	0	0	9
GCSE	0	6	1	0	0	7
GNVQ	4	9	9	0	0	22
NVQ	0	4	2	1	0	7
Other	2	5	3	0	0	10
Total	9	30	15	1	0	55

# Curriculum Areas

## Computing

### Grade 3

9 Inspectors observed 11 lessons that covered the main courses. They agreed with most of the judgements in the self-assessment report but found that a few strengths were overstated and some weaknesses were not identified.

#### Key strengths

- effective teaching
- good-quality outward collaborative provision
- some rigorous course management arrangements

#### Weaknesses

- some low retention rates
- poor achievement rates on a few courses
- underdeveloped review arrangements for some courses
- specialist resources and some accommodation

10 Inspectors agreed with the college's own assessment that the quality of teaching is satisfactory or better. Teaching on higher level courses is consistently good. In the more effective lessons, teachers focus on the development of appropriate levels of technical skill and knowledge. They give good illustrations of the applications of computers in industry. Students enthusiastically engage in the various practical learning activities. In weaker lessons: teachers do not give students sufficient help with practical tasks; they do not keep students working throughout the lesson; and students take few notes. Several students are not well informed about the requirements of their course.

11 Inspectors confirmed that students' achievements and the retention rates on some courses have been poor for several years. For example, during the last three years achievement on the GCSE course in information systems has been consistently below the national average for sixth form colleges. The pass rate on the GCE A level course in computing has only reached the national average in one of the last three years. The college assesses the achievement rates on GCE A level courses by comparing students' predicted GCE A level grades based on their GCSE results with their actual results. It has found some evidence of value being added. Achievement rates on the GNVQ foundation and intermediate courses in IT reveal significant fluctuations. In 1997, the pass rate for the GNVQ advanced course was well above the national average; however, the retention rate for the course was low. Students' work examined during the inspection was of a satisfactory standard.

12 During the last year, the college has introduced a number of positive changes to the organisation and management of courses to rectify weaknesses that it had identified in computing provision. Developments include: the introduction of more effective meetings for staff teaching courses; a review and restructuring of the staffing arrangements; and new systems for monitoring the provision for students. Arrangements for reviewing courses are not well developed. Reviews contain little analysis of data and evaluative comment, and targets and action to bring about improvements lack precision. Outward collaborative provision in computing, based in the college, which has been developed recently, is well managed and extends the range of provision for adults. Inspectors found that the organisation of the teaching of GNVQ key skills in IT for students studying at foundation and intermediate levels is inadequate. This weakness was not identified in the college's self-assessment report.



# Curriculum Areas

The teaching of key skills is inappropriately combined with a course leading to the qualification awarded by the RSA Examinations Board (RSA) combined course in computer literacy and IT. The number of hours taught on this varies between student groups and in some cases the content of the two parts is not adequately covered.

individual help. Occasionally, trailing wires in classrooms could raise possible health and safety issues.

13 Some staff have undertaken relevant training activities to keep abreast of the latest technical developments. Inspectors found that the equipment for teaching IT, especially on more advanced courses, was inadequate. Equipment is not sufficiently up to date. Several important computer applications can only be described to students, not demonstrated. Electronic mail and the Internet are not readily available for staff or student use. Some equipment is unreliable and this affects the quality of provision. These significant weaknesses were not listed in the self-assessment report. Much of the accommodation is satisfactory and some is enlivened by appropriate display materials. Some teaching rooms are too small to allow teachers to circulate amongst students and give

## Examples of students' achievements in computing, 1995 to 1997

Course grouping		1995	1996	1997
GCSE information systems	Retention (%)	71	65	75
	Pass rate (%)	0	7	10
GCE A level computing	Retention (%)	64	60	41
	Pass rate (%)	64	79	71
GNVQ foundation IT	Retention (%)	93	89	86
	Pass rate (%)	77	6	75
GNVQ intermediate IT	Retention (%)	85	77	73
	Pass rate (%)	0	29	71
GNVQ advanced IT	Retention (%)	*	*	56
	Pass rate (%)	*	*	89

Source: college data

\*course not running

# Curriculum Areas

## Business Studies

### Grade 2

**14 Inspectors observed 16 lessons which covered the main courses in the area, and included a sample of provision offered through outward collaborative arrangements. In most cases, inspectors agreed with the college's assessment of strengths and weaknesses. The college overstated a few strengths.**

#### Key strengths

- the good quality of most teaching
- well-planned lessons
- the good standard of students' work
- retention and achievement rates
- well-structured action plans

#### Weaknesses

- student attendance and punctuality
- aspects of the teaching of key skills

15 Inspectors confirmed the college's assessment that teaching is effective. The provision offered in the college and through arrangements for outward collaboration is of consistently good quality. Lessons are well planned and teachers use appropriate methods. Teachers give valuable feedback to students on their progress. In a few weaker lessons, teachers did not make the learning objectives clear to students, did not correct inaccurate responses to questions and used overhead transparencies which were difficult to read. Work experience is especially effective in the outward collaborative provision. In many courses, the teaching of key skills is not well developed; some students do not understand why they need to develop key skills. This issue was not commented upon in the college's self-assessment report.

16 Students' work is of a good standard. Inspectors agreed that retention rates are sound on many courses, including GNVQ foundation and intermediate, GCSE business studies and GCE A level and GCE advanced supplementary (AS) business studies. Inspectors confirmed that on a few courses the attendance rates and the punctuality of students were poor. Achievements are mostly good. In 1996-97, the pass rate in GCSE business studies was significantly above the national average for sixth form colleges. Retention and pass rates on most courses that rely on outward collaborative arrangements are high. However, on a few such courses during the last two years, retention or achievement rates were low at below 60 per cent.

17 Outward collaborative provision is generally well managed. Efficient administrative links between the college and partner organisations have been established. The planning of provision and the action plans for achieving improvements are appropriately aligned with the college's strategic objectives. The use of student evaluations is not well developed. There are few opportunities for teachers working within college and those working in outward collaborative provision to share good practice. Inspectors found the college offered a suitable range of courses.

18 Learning materials are of good quality. Facilities for IT are adequate and readily available for students. Part-time teachers are given opportunities to identify their training needs as part of the college's system for performance review. Too few teachers are suitably qualified to assess students' prior learning. Accommodation is good.

# Curriculum Areas

## Examples of students' achievements in business studies, 1995 to 1997

Course grouping		1995	1996	1997
GNVQ foundation and intermediate	Retention (%)	76	81	93
	Pass rate (%)	68	63	87
GNVQ advanced	Retention (%)	63	82	74
	Pass rate (%)	81	88	60
GCE A/AS level	Retention (%)	62	68	74
	Pass rate (%)	87	97	80
GCSE	Retention (%)	72	79	95
	Pass rate (%)	17	54	63

*Source: college data*

# Curriculum Areas

## Art and Design

### Grade 2

**19 Inspectors observed 13 lessons which covered the subjects and levels of study in courses in art and design, media and the performing arts. Inspectors agreed with most of the judgements in the college's self-assessment report. They confirmed the strengths in the teaching and also in the development of appropriate skills by students. Whilst a few weaknesses had been overlooked in the self-assessment report, action had already been taken that had effectively rectified some of the weaknesses that had been identified.**

#### Key strengths

- the outstanding quality of some teaching
- effective provision and support for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities
- a well-led and united staff team
- some high passes at GCE A level
- effective internal verification
- good links with the community and industry

#### Weaknesses

- GNVQ intermediate pass rates
- retention rates on GCE A level and GNVQ courses
- some written work from students
- the accommodation in the performing arts

20 The faculty of creative arts is well managed; staff work well together. As was identified in the self-assessment report, teachers plan lessons thoroughly and use an appropriate variety of teaching methods. Some lessons were outstanding. They included: effective

demonstrations of complex skills; good use of audiovisual aids; and some successful work in groups, especially in the provision for performing arts and media. Assignment briefs are well written and offer sufficient challenge. Students' learning is supported by printed learning materials that are well researched. In media provision, strong links with local industry support the teaching effectively. Practical work is carefully prepared and structured to meet different abilities of students. Teachers pay appropriate attention to health and safety issues. In a few courses, the small size of groups restricts the range of teaching methods used and the effectiveness of lessons. Assessments of students' work are thorough and teachers give detailed and constructive written and verbal feedback to students. There is a reliable system of internal verification for all courses. Staff have made significant progress in rectifying weaknesses identified in the self-assessment report, for example, some assignments that made excessive demands on students, and low completion rates in media provision.

21 Students develop appropriate skills. In art and design, students develop skills that reach a high level in printmaking and demonstrate good approaches to drawing from observations. In media courses students' practical work in the production of video and radio is of a high standard. Media students benefit from managing a college radio station. Performing arts students are involved in performances in the community. Inspectors confirmed the college's own assessment that students benefit from work experience and involvement in community projects. Students' written assignments are of an appropriate standard, but in performing arts written work is not well presented. Most students develop an appropriate range of key skills. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make good progress in art and design courses; teaching methods and support arrangements

# Curriculum Areas

meet their requirements. Inspectors agreed that, although many students start their courses with low entry qualifications, they achieve well in their studies. Examination results at GCE A level are consistently good. There are particularly high pass rates in both GCE A level art and design and music; in 1996-97, 100 per cent of students who completed these courses passed. The college recognised that the retention and pass rates on some courses are low. Inspectors agreed that pass rates in GNVQ media and art and design are poor. The retention rates in GCE A level and GNVQ courses are improving but are still below the national average for the sector.

22 Specialist resources in art and design and media are good. In art and design, the workshops are well managed and there are good facilities for three-dimensional design and ceramics. In media, there is good-quality video editing equipment, professional radio facilities and appropriate specialist computer equipment. A good range of students' artwork is displayed. Accommodation and equipment in performing arts are often inadequate. This issue was not identified in the self-assessment report. A number of recent staff appointments have further increased the industrial and professional experience of the team.

## Examples of students' achievements in art and design, 1995 to 1997

Course grouping		1995	1996	1997
GCE A level	Retention (%)	54	62	77
	Pass rate (%)	84	91	83
GNVQ intermediate	Retention (%)	62	76	72
	Pass rate (%)	63	56	39

Source: college data

# Curriculum Areas

## English and Communications

### Grade 2

**23 Inspectors observed 12 lessons that covered provision in GCE A level, GCSE and GNVQ subjects. Inspectors confirmed most strengths identified in the college's self-assessment report, and noted some additional ones. The report understated a few weaknesses.**

#### Key strengths

- the high quality of teaching
- effective arrangements to support students in their learning
- good examination results
- well-managed provision
- high-quality resources

#### Weaknesses

- the narrow range of provision in English
- some initial guidance and retention problems
- underuse of the specialist expertise of the communications team

24 Inspection evidence confirmed the college's claim that teaching is of good quality. Most teachers structure courses and plan lessons well. Occasionally lesson plans do not identify clear learning objectives or teaching methods. In a few lessons, teaching methods lack appropriate variety. Teachers prepare high-quality printed materials to support students' learning but some make little use of teaching aids such as videos and audio tapes. Students learn to plan and monitor their studies. They are given comprehensive information on course content and assessment criteria, and schedules for assignments. Effective twice-termly assessments and reviews of progress link well into tutorials. A useful 'learning contract', which teacher and student

complete together, helps them jointly to tackle particular difficulties that a student may be facing on a course.

25 Students' work is of a sound standard. GCE A level and GCSE results are around the national average for sixth form colleges. Analysis by the college on value added in GCSE courses indicates that students gain significantly from their course. This strength was identified in the college's self-assessment report. Retention rates are low on a few two-year courses.

26 English and communications provision is generally well managed. Staff work closely together. They jointly plan and regularly review courses. Common approaches have ensured that a few cases of extended staff absence have been covered effectively without disrupting students' progress. However, little time is set aside for staff to share new teaching methods, materials and ways of enabling students to learn. Staff take effective action to address issues identified in course reviews. As indicated in the self-assessment report, the range of courses is narrow and designed for full-time 16 to 18 year old students. Staff have made some plans to expand the number of part-time evening courses in English and communications. Recent changes have been made to develop workshops so that students can work on their own individual learning plans. This innovation is helping a wider range of students.

27 Separate classes in communications skills, which are offered as part of GNVQ foundation and intermediate level courses, are effectively managed. Communications and vocational staff work closely together to plan the work and to ensure that assignments are relevant and appropriate. College-wide systems to develop communication and language skills as an integral part of other courses are underdeveloped. This issue was not identified in the college's self-assessment report. On GNVQ advanced courses, the faculty responsible for the course also teaches the

# Curriculum Areas

communications element of the course. Some of these course teams do not draw on the specialist expertise and resources held by the college's teaching team for communication skills.

28 Specialist resources are good. Teaching rooms provide suitable working environments. Students value the text books and learning materials provided by the college. The library is well stocked with relevant books. Classrooms used for vocational communications classes are attractive, but not well resourced. The strengths and weaknesses found by inspectors in relation to specialist resources were not identified in the self-assessment report.

## Examples of students' achievements in English and communications, 1995 to 1997

Course grouping		1995	1996	1997
GCE A level	Retention (%)	75	72	65
	Pass rate (%)	94	91	87
GCSE	Retention (%)	65	66	72
	Pass rate (%)	52	58	58
Communications	Retention (%)	*	76	79
	Pass rate (%)	*	82	85

Source: college data

\*course not running

# Cross-college Provision

## Support for Students

### Grade 2

**29 Inspectors agreed with most of the college's assessment of its support for students. They considered that certain strengths had been somewhat overstated and that the college had underestimated some weaknesses in its provision of learning support.**

#### Key strengths

- effective admissions and induction procedures
- thorough monitoring of students' progress and welfare
- mostly good-quality learning support
- comprehensive support for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities
- effective advice and guidance for progression to higher education or employment
- outstanding personal support for students

#### Weaknesses

- ineffective arrangements for taught parts of the tutorial programme
- underdeveloped support services for part-time students

30 The college has clear policies and well-documented procedures for supporting students, particularly full-time students. College literature on recruitment is informative, produced to a common standard and targeted appropriately at different groups of students. Impartial presentations are given to pupils in those local schools to which the college has access. The college holds three open days each year which are well attended. A centralised admissions system with clear procedures and targets ensures that prospective students receive

impartial advice. Those applying for full-time courses receive an interview when they apply to the college and again at enrolment. Students who enrol late or join part-time classes have less opportunity to receive the same high level of advice and guidance.

31 A well-structured programme for the induction of full-time students helps them to settle in successfully. Induction interviews between personal tutors and students establish a useful starting point for future reviews of progress. During their first half-term students can transfer easily between courses. Inspectors' discussions with students and the low level of course transfer in the current year support the college's judgement that initial advice and guidance are impartial and effective. The college is aware that students who enrol late and part-time students may receive a less thorough induction; it has begun to address this issue.

32 Inspectors agree that the college has a good system of support for full-time students. It is well managed by four senior tutors who work closely with heads of faculty. Every student has a personal tutor. Tutors usually teach students in their tutor group. Detailed half-termly assessments are followed by effective review meetings between personal tutors and students. Tutors discuss students' academic progress, attendance and issues affecting work, including any need for additional support. These meetings also provide an opportunity for students to receive advice and help with their individual learning plans and their applications for further or higher education or employment. All students complete a record of achievement and students on advanced courses are encouraged to take part in a post-16 'compact' agreement which prepares them for entrance to higher education and employment. These arrangements are highly effective and are valued by students. On part-time evening courses, the course tutor acts as personal tutor. Students are entitled to a 'progress and



# Cross-college Provision

progression' interview and the opportunity to compile a record of achievement. The effectiveness of these new arrangements has yet to be assessed.

33 The college has not yet found a wholly effective way to deliver taught parts of the tutorial programme. Tutorials on vocational courses are integrated with course timetables. Since September 1997, tutorials have been separately timetabled for students following GCE A level and GCSE programmes. These have met with varying degrees of success. Some useful work is undertaken in tutorials but not all students attend when required. The system is currently being reviewed.

34 There is good provision of learning support for students. Support requirements in English and communications are assessed at induction. Further referrals, if needed, are made later in the year by tutors or by students themselves. Support in numeracy skills is also provided. Teachers provide support for students as an integral part of vocational courses and are allocated extra time to support students on GCE A level courses. The college's additional support unit provides an extensive range of support for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and those who have particular language needs, for example students who have recently arrived in the country and speak little or no English. Student support workers, key support workers for individual students and external specialist support services are used well to support students. Excellent links with a number of special schools, for example the Wilson Stuart special school, include joint arrangements for supporting students.

35 Much of the learning support and additional support is of good quality, but there is no co-ordinated college-wide system. Some students do not have action plans for individual learning that contain specific targets. Some plans have objectives that are too broad to be properly monitored. There is no 'drop-in' centre other than for IT, where students can

obtain help with learning and study skills without prior arrangement. These weaknesses were not fully identified by the college in its self-assessment.

36 The college has a well-resourced careers unit. Students receive effective individual careers guidance and help with finding employment. Staff organise a range of other activities, including careers talks to groups of students, visits to universities, and help with interviews and job applications. Students are well supported in making applications for higher education.

37 Inspectors agreed with the college's assessment that it provides excellent personal support for students. A confidential counselling service provided by a qualified counsellor is well used. There is substantial financial help, including travel support and meals assistance for students who qualify under the college's criteria. Students on full-time courses receive free textbook loans. The college has a 24-place nursery and also offers help with childcare to students on courses supported by the European Social Fund. Students, parents and school representatives who talked to inspectors were warm in their praise for the calm working environment and harmonious ethos of the college.

# Cross-college Provision

## General Resources

### Grade 2

**38 Inspectors agreed in most respects with the college's assessment of its general resources. Significant developments and improvements have taken place since the last inspection. A number of weaknesses identified by the college in its self-assessment have been addressed. Inspectors considered that the college had somewhat overstated the strength of its facilities for IT.**

#### Key strengths

- well-maintained accommodation
- the well-resourced library
- access for students with physical disabilities
- staff work areas

#### Weaknesses

- low space utilisation
- some out-of-date IT hardware and software
- social and recreational facilities for students

39 The college's general accommodation is very well maintained. Teaching rooms are well furnished and a substantial number are equipped with overhead projectors and whiteboards. Attractive displays, including students' artwork, enhance much of the college; a few areas remain bare. Low space utilisation was a weakness identified by the college in its self-assessment and subsequently confirmed by inspectors. This issue was raised in the previous inspection report. Shortcomings remain despite action taken to improve the use of the accommodation.

40 Inspectors agreed with the college that the library has good resources and is well used by students. The 130 study places are sufficient

except at some times of peak demand.

Two seminar rooms next to the library have television and video-viewing facilities that can be pre-booked by staff or students. There are 20,000 books and a wide range of magazines, videos, newspapers and other resources.

The library issues text books on free loan to students. Opening hours generally meet the needs of students, but do not extend to weekends or college vacations.

41 In its self-assessment report the college judged its resources for IT a strength, but inspectors found a number of shortcomings. Students find that the college's IT provision meets most of their needs but some equipment is slow and some software is outdated.

Although there are 158 networked computers available for the use of students, which gives a high overall ratio of students to computers of approximately 6:1, many machines are not able to run modern software packages. The college has a large number of CD-ROM databases, but few are networked. Some additional computers are available, including specialist machines for art and design and portable computers for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Thirty of the networked machines are in the college's Canavan Centre which provides open access to IT and has useful facilities that include scanning, graphics and colour printing. Access to the Internet is very restricted. For part of the week, half the networked machines in the Canavan Centre are reserved for students on computer literacy courses, which reduces opportunities for other students. There are some computers elsewhere in the college offering access on demand to students.

42 Inspectors agreed with the college that access to accommodation for students with disabilities is particularly good. Only two small areas of the college are not accessible. Several significant improvements have been made since the last inspection, including the installation of a second lift and the provision of an open study

# Cross-college Provision

space for students who use wheelchairs. Social areas for students are adequate. Several improvements have been made in response to student feedback, including the recent provision of a common room for adult students. Students have access to a lunchtime youth club, to the leisure centre and to a limited range of organised leisure and sport activities. The college plans to improve the provision of recreational activities and has two youth workers leading these developments. There are enough staff work areas, most of which are equipped with computers, although some are not linked to the college network. A few staff workrooms lack adequate storage facilities.

## Quality Assurance

### Grade 3

**43 Overall, inspectors agreed with the college's identification of strengths and weaknesses in quality assurance. A few strengths were overstated.**

#### Key strengths

- the well-developed use of perception surveys
- the setting of performance indicators
- the monitoring of progress on action plans
- effective and rigorous self-assessment

#### Weaknesses

- the links between quality assurance and strategic planning
- the co-ordination of quality assurance across the college
- the variable quality of course reviews
- the implementation of staff appraisal

44 The college has a well-developed policy on quality assurance and is committed to continuous improvement. Frequent meetings and reviews help to ensure that college

performance is regularly monitored.

College-wide targets for student achievement and retention rates are set out in the strategic plan. However, targets for students' achievements are not always set at course level. The college's self-assessment did not comment on the extent to which arrangements for quality assurance lead to measurable improvements in performance.

45 Reporting arrangements on quality assurance are underdeveloped. Individual course reviews are discussed by line managers but they are not brought together to give an overview of the quality of provision across all college courses. Some appropriate arrangements are in place for monitoring collaborative provision. However, roles and responsibilities for monitoring quality of provision, including those for observing teaching in collaborative provision, are not sufficiently defined. The self-assessment report recognised that the college does not have an effective mechanism for feeding the outcomes of the quality assurance process into the strategic plan. It has not yet decided how to address this issue. The college has recently formed a task group on quality assurance to co-ordinate self-assessment reports.

46 Course reviews are uneven in quality; some contain little evaluative comment and are not effective. Too few focus on the quality of teaching and learning. The college's self-assessment report did not identify these weaknesses. Good progress has been made in providing helpful statistical data and performance indicators to enable course teams to monitor attendance and retention rates. Information is also made available on students' predicted grades and actual grades for each GCE A level subject. These data are not always referred to in course reviews. Heads of faculties meet with team leaders to review students' achievements, but little use is made of comparative data in these reviews.

# Cross-college Provision

47 A well-established system of perception surveys assists the college to monitor the opinions of students and other groups. The self-assessment report did not fully recognise the importance of this strength. Surveys have been conducted for several years using the same questions, enabling the college to analyse trends in student satisfaction. Action plans are developed to address key findings and the implementation of these is monitored by managers. The staff survey generates useful information. For example, a helpful booklet was produced outlining the college's support services for students in response to staff comments. Quality assurance arrangements for other support areas of the college are improving. The self-assessment report acknowledges that the college needs to develop these further. Some clear service standards have been set and a start has been made on measuring performance in financial services, estates, administration, personnel work and careers guidance. Standards have yet to be developed for some areas of work.

48 The self-assessment report recognised that the college lacks a fully developed staff appraisal system. Regular audits monitor the range of staff skills. Staff discuss their development needs with their line managers. Staff requests are considered in the context of the college's operational objectives but arrangements for planning and establishing an order of priority for staff development are not well developed. Links between staff development activities and the strategic plan are not sufficiently clear.

49 The process of self-assessment was systematic, thorough and comprehensive. A steering group guided the process. A day was set aside for staff training and a helpful handbook was produced to guide staff on self-assessment. The self-assessment report is clearly set out and well organised. In most sections judgements about provision are closely related to the statements on quality in Council Circular 97/12, *Validating Self-assessment*.

Curriculum areas include an analysis of staffing but no other specialist resources. Eighty lessons were observed and judgements fed into the curriculum self-assessment reports. Most action plans relate well to the weaknesses that have been identified. Action points are effectively cross-referenced to establish their connection with the college's strategic objectives. However, intended outcomes are not always precisely defined or easy to measure. The time frame for action is often unclear. There was little evidence of systematic analysis of achievement rates and trends over a period of years. Occasionally, significantly high or low achievement rates on courses were not referred to in curriculum self-assessment sections and did not appear to have been taken into account in making judgements. The college sought some external advice from a consultant during the process of self-assessment.

## Governance

### *Grade 2*

**50 Inspectors agreed with many of the strengths outlined in the self-assessment report, but considered that there are a number of additional weaknesses to be addressed.**

#### Key strengths

- the commitment and expertise of governors
- procedures for the appointment of governors
- working relationship between governors and senior managers
- the corporation's evaluation of its own performance
- standing orders for the corporation
- governors' involvement in the development and monitoring of strategic plans

# Cross-college Provision

- regular non-financial management information to the corporation
- the monitoring of academic performance by governors

## Weaknesses

- the terms of reference for the finance and general purposes committee
- financial reporting to the full corporation
- insufficient information on outward collaborative provision
- arrangements for the induction of newly-appointed governors
- the register of interests

51 The corporation has 19 members: the principal, two staff governors, one student governor, three co-opted governors, one parent governor and 11 business governors, including a TEC nominee. The results of a formal skills audit have been used to establish an 'ideal profile' for corporation membership. The membership and review committee thoroughly scrutinises the appointment and reappointment of governors, taking into account the need to maintain a balanced membership. Procedures for the appointment of governors have been comprehensively documented. As identified in the self-assessment report, newly-appointed governors are not provided with sufficient induction training. Governors come from a wide range of backgrounds and their expertise is effectively used to support the college. Governors conduct their business efficiently and clearly understand the distinction between governance and management. Their rate of attendance at meetings is high. The corporation has recently completed a thorough evaluation of its own performance based on a questionnaire.

52 The FEFC's audit service concludes that, within the scope of its assessment, the governance of the college is adequate.

The corporation substantially conducts its business in accordance with the instrument and articles of government. It also substantially fulfils its responsibilities under the financial memorandum with the FEFC.

53 The clerk to the corporation has responsibility for the finance function. This arrangement may make it difficult for the independence of the clerk's role to be assured. Inspectors agreed that corporation meetings are effectively chaired. Discussions and actions are focused, and well reported and minuted. Corporation papers, with the exception of confidential items, are available for public inspection. Early in its existence the corporation adopted a model code of conduct for its members which is not sufficiently detailed. The clerk maintains a register of the financial interests of governors and of staff who hold significant financial responsibilities. The register is not comprehensive and has not been fully updated each year. Comprehensive standing orders have been established to guide the conduct of the corporation and its committees.

54 As stated in the self-assessment report, governors fulfil their role in determining the college's strategic direction and receive regular progress reports on the achievement of strategic objectives. Governors receive comprehensive and regular management information on student enrolments, retention and achievements, and on the achievement of unit targets. However, the corporation has not been informed in sufficient detail about the nature, scope and financial implications of the college's outward collaborative provision.

55 The budget is debated and approved by governors before the start of the financial year. Governors also provide an annual account of their stewardship of the college's funds. Throughout the year, the finance and general purposes committee receives management accounts at monthly intervals, and scrutinises

# Cross-college Provision

the college's financial performance in considerable detail. Comprehensive reports on the committee's work are regularly included in corporation papers. However, the corporation does not receive full management accounts at termly intervals.

56 Inspectors confirmed that the corporation has established an appropriate committee structure, and has formally agreed the deployment of governors to the committees making the best use of their expertise. Each committee has terms of reference which have been approved by the corporation. Terms of reference for the finance and general purposes committee do not fully define its role and responsibilities. The curriculum committee has a remit to scrutinise the quality of the college's work and receives regular reports from the executive on results and curriculum related matters. Effective arrangements have been established for the appointment, appraisal and development of senior staff.

## Management

### *Grade 2*

**57 Inspectors found that the college's self-assessment of management identifies many of the strengths and weaknesses but some important additional strengths and weaknesses were overlooked.**

#### Key strengths

- strategic and operational planning systems
- the management of organisational change
- developments in provision to widen participation
- line management arrangements
- external relationships
- commitment to equal opportunities

#### Weaknesses

- financial management reports
- arrangements for the executive to review the college's financial performance
- lack of an overall policy for developments in IT
- reporting arrangements for collaborative provision

58 Senior managers have a strong team approach to their responsibilities. They are effectively steering change in line with the college's mission and the objectives of the strategic plan. Managers have adopted a structured, consultative approach to strategic planning which is supported by thorough market research. The mission statement which has recently been revised and the strategic plan are well publicised and understood. The majority of staff support the values, aims and objectives of the institution as expressed in the strategic plan. Nevertheless, the level of change within the institution has caused uncertainties amongst some staff. Managers recognise in their self-assessment that they have not yet gained the support of the whole staff for the mission. Clearly-defined line management systems work particularly well for senior managers. The college recognises the need to strengthen management arrangements for middle managers and their staff. Inspectors confirmed that communications in the college are good.

59 A comprehensive range of policies and procedures is regularly reviewed and updated. Several new policies have been added. Some policies have yet to be fully implemented. There is no overall policy for developing IT in the curriculum. The college's strategy for IT is limited to issues of maintenance and replacement.

60 The FEFC's audit service concludes that, within the scope of its review, the college's financial management is adequate. The finance

# Cross-college Provision

team, led by the finance manager, is suitably experienced. Management accounts are produced within five working days. Financial reports are sound but should include more detailed forecasts of income and expenditure for the current financial year. The principal and finance manager meet twice weekly to review the college's financial performance. The college executive does not formally receive full management accounts at sufficiently regular intervals. Budget holders receive timely reports on expenditure, and expert advice is available to them when it is required. Financial regulations have been revised recently. The college's internal and external auditors are satisfied with the college's internal control system; they have identified no significant weaknesses.

61 The college has effectively managed the achievement of efficiency gains. It has made good progress towards targets set for increasing the proportion of non-FEFC funded work. In line with its strategic objectives, the college has successfully sought to widen participation; significant growth has been achieved beyond the traditional core provision for students aged 16 to 19 years. Over the past two years, rapid growth has been achieved in outward collaborative provision. This provision is generally well managed but reports made to senior managers are not sufficiently detailed.

62 The college has good links with a number of external organisations and has recently entered a collaborative partnership with four other Birmingham colleges. The college benefits from effective links with universities. Liaison with some local secondary schools works well despite a highly competitive environment. Close links with special schools are helping to increase the college's work with students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Strong and productive relationships have been established with the TEC and other external organisations. The college has gained the status of 'preferred supplier' with the TEC.

63 The college's computerised management information system provides useful internal management reports. Admissions data are generated at appropriate intervals and provide management with reliable information on recruitment trends. Targets have been set against which the college can measure its performance on student recruitment. Comprehensive data on students' absence and on retention rates are provided for management and course teams through the issue of management information reports. Only one head of faculty can access management information directly from the computer network.

64 The college promotes equality of opportunity and has a positive, well-established multicultural ethos. The comprehensive equal opportunities policy has recently been updated. Inspectors agreed with the college's recognition in its self-assessment that following the monitoring of equal opportunities there are some weak arrangements for taking subsequent action. Activities organised by the equal opportunities group are well attended and appreciated by students. The college has reviewed its policy statement on disability and has met its commitment to improve facilities for students with disabilities.

## Conclusions

65 The self-assessment report provided a useful basis for planning and carrying out the inspection. Inspectors agreed with many of the strengths and weaknesses identified in the self-assessment report. They considered that the college overestimated some of its strengths and did not identify or understated some of its weaknesses. Inspectors confirmed most curriculum grades awarded by the college. All but one of the grades for cross-college aspects were confirmed by inspection.

66 Strengths and weaknesses identified during the inspection are listed under each section of this report. The main strengths and weaknesses are identified in the summary.

# College Statistics

## Student numbers by age (July 1997)

<i>Age</i>	<i>%</i>
Under 16	0
16-18 years	30
19-24 years	24
25+ years	46
Not known	0
Total	100

*Source: college data*

## Student numbers by level of study (July 1997)

<i>Level of study</i>	<i>%</i>
Foundation	25
Intermediate	53
Advanced	21
Higher education	0
Leisure/recreation (non-schedule 2)	1
Total	100

*Source: college data*

## Student numbers by mode of attendance and curriculum area (July 1997)

<i>Programme area</i>	<i>Full time</i>	<i>Part time</i>	<i>Total provision %</i>
Science	231	753	22
Engineering	32	19	1
Business	137	446	13
Hotel and catering	18	1,445	32
Health and community care	93	680	17
Art and design	70	8	2
Humanities	230	313	12
Basic education	38	19	1
Total	849	3,683	100

*Source: college data*

## Staff expressed as full-time equivalents (July 1997)

	<i>Perman-ent</i>	<i>Fixed term</i>	<i>Casual</i>	<i>Total</i>
Direct learning contact	50	4	1	55
Supporting direct learning contact	13	2	0	15
Other support	33	6	1	40
Total	96	12	2	110

*Source: college data, rounded to nearest full-time equivalent*



# College Statistics

## Three-year Trends

### Financial data

	1994-95	1995-96	1996-97
Income	£3,325,000	£3,648,000	£3,875,000
Average level of funding (ALF)			
Out-turn to 1995-96; funded 1996-97	£22.62	£19.19	£21.75
Payroll as a proportion of income	73%	68%	64%
Achievement of funding target	100%	123%	113%
Diversity of income	8%	8%	13%
Operating surplus	£92,000	£7,000	£25,000

Sources: Income – Council Circulars 96/29 (1994-95), 97/35 (1995-96), college (1996-97)

ALF – Performance Indicators 1995-96 (1994-95 and 1995-96), Funding Allocations 1996-97 (1996-97)

Payroll – Council Circulars 96/29 (1994-95), 97/35 (1995-96), college (1996-97)

Achievement of funding target – Performance Indicators 1995-96 (1994-95 and 1995-96), college (1996-97)

Diversity of income – Council Circulars 96/29 (1994-95), 97/35 (1995-96), college (1996-97)

Operating surplus – Council Circulars 96/29 (1994-95), 97/35 (1995-96), college (1996-97)

### Performance data for students aged 16 to 18

Qualifications		1994-95	1995-96	1996-97
GCE A level	Number of candidates	137	147	150
	Average point score per entry	3.8	4.2	4.0
	Position in tables	middle third	middle third	middle third
Advanced vocational	Number in final year	45	65	45
	Percentage achieving qualification	47%	54%	44%
	Position in tables	bottom 10%	bottom 10%	bottom 10%
Intermediate vocational	Number in final year	*	136	116
	Percentage achieving qualification	*	51%	67%
	Position in tables	*	bottom third	middle third

Source: DfEE

Note: the majority of the college's students are 19 years of age or older.

The achievements of these students are not covered in published DfEE performance tables

\*1994-95 intermediate vocational results not available

### Students' achievements

		1994-95	1995-96	1996-97
Advanced academic	Pass (%)	81	80	78
	Retention (%)	64	68	68
Intermediate academic	Pass (%)	41	51	46
	Retention (%)	73	64	76
Advanced vocational	Pass (%)	77	68	73
	Retention (%)	61	68	57
Intermediate vocational	Pass (%)	65	80	67
	Retention (%)	76	78	83

Source: college data

**FEFC Inspection Report 48/98**

**Published by the  
Further Education Funding Council  
May 1998**