

**MINUTES OF STUDENT FOCUS GROUP MEETING**  
**held on 26 June 2007**

PRESENT: Margaret White (Director of Studies) Chair  
Jenny Sims (Director of Studies)  
June Asby Sutton  
Judith Palmer Wandle Valley  
Charlotte Wallace Cheam  
Bridget Gill Former student  
Barbara Austin-Olsen Sutton  
Ken Rouse Sutton  
Elizabeth Rees Sutton  
Maggie Cundy Sutton  
Buaphuan Smith Sutton  
David Haslam Sutton  
Manish Bhaisare Carshalton Boys  
Joy Diamond Sutton

1.APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

2.MINUTES of the meeting held on 14 March 2007 – agreed

3.MATTERS ARISING

4e)**Employers** – the recent ALI Inspection monitoring visit in June graded SCOLA’s employer engagement activity as “reasonable” with good efforts being made.

Generally, the Inspection Report was good, and the only area deemed ‘unsatisfactory’ was Attendance Patterns. However, we felt this was a little unfair as not all colleges collect this data and there are no national benchmarks.

4.**Funding, Fees and Programme planning** – the College has taken legal advice about the removal of the over-60 concession and invited Paul Burstow, MP, to discuss the matter with Senior Management. He has promised to raise the issue with Bill Ramell, Minister for Education. However, it is a fact that older people are not a Government funding priority, although an important and significant part of our student profile – about 20% are over 60 with 11% over 60 on FE (exam) courses, particularly in Languages and Art.

It was also confirmed that English classes for non-English speaking students (ESOL) will no longer be free. This was a political decision by Government, and colleges will be allowed to set their own fee levels for these classes.  
Skills for Life English and Maths will continue to be free.

The suggestion from the Student Focus Group of a £5 voucher if enrolling onto more than one course was considered, and in the end, it was decided to offer a £5 discount if the course is more than £150. We hope that this will be an incentive for students to enrol given the fee increases.

At the suggestion of the Focus Group, the Principal wrote to all students explaining the reasons for fee increases and the removal of the over-60 concession.

A question was asked about young students and it was confirmed that 16-18 year olds on accredited courses are a funding priority and we are not allowed to charge fees. We claim the funding from the LSC. However, the drop-out rate in this age group and failure to complete exams has a negative impact on retention and success rates.

#### 4.PROSPECTUS 07/08

Comments were favourable but students found some classes difficult to find without an index. Margaret explained that the splitting of the courses meant extra pages were needed and we could not afford to increase the number of pages. The index was replaced with a more comprehensive contents page at the front.

#### 5.STUDENT HANDBOOK

Suggestions about the handbook were noted as follows:

- Make the term dates clearer flagging up the odd Easter dates in 2008 and make-up days.
- Add a page for notes if room
- P.44 – confirmed that we are still part of London Borough of Sutton who have a duty to provide post-16 education, and we are in Council buildings, although the funding now comes from the Learning and Skills Council.

#### 6.CANCELLED CLASSES 06/07

A report was tabled at the suggestion of the Focus Group. Jenny explained that only 9% of classes were cancelled or closed in 06/07 which shows better planning than 3 years ago when it was 20%. Cancellations occurred across all departments, however, so it is difficult to ascertain a particular pattern emerging.

#### 7.COMPLAINTS ANALYSIS SPRING 07

Tabled for discussion. The suggestion was made of having a “guest book” for compliments and a box for evaluation/your voice forms in order to encourage more comments from students.

#### 8.ROADSHOW RESULTS 06/07

Tabled for discussion and interest (see attached). The student profile and gender split remains similar for the last 5 years, with an average of 40% being new to SCOLA. There is a consistently high percentage of satisfaction with administrative procedures and tuition.

#### 9.FUTURE DEVELOPMENTS

a)Wilsons School – this will be a new Centre for SCOLA from September 2008 with a small programme of classes on a Wednesday evening.

b)North Cheam – we will be opening a new Centre on the London Road sometime in the new year. The programme has not yet been decided.

#### 10.EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY

Nothing was raised

#### 11.HEALTH AND SAFETY

a)Evacuation Procedures – Maggie suggested that it would be helpful to show disabled people how the evacuation chairs are used.

b)Sinks in Jewellery Studio – complaint that the sinks are too shallow and small and the hot water splashes. Industrial traps are needed to catch silver.

12.ANY OTHER BUSINESS

a)Messages to tutors – complaint that students are good at phoning in their absence, but the messages are not always passed on by the office.

13.DATE OF NEXT MEETING

Wednesday 5 December 2007 at Sutton Centre 6.30-8.00pm