

**MINUTES OF STUDENT FOCUS GROUP MEETING
held on 14 March 2007**

PRESENT:

Margaret White (Director of Studies) Chair	
Sonja Compton (Director of Studies)	
Lindy Bryce (Equality and Diversity, SCOLA)	
Buaphuan Smith	Sutton Manor
June Asby	Sutton
Elizabeth Rees	Sutton (Student Governor)
Dorothy Sibley	Sutton
Ken Rouse	Sutton
Bridget Gill	Sutton

1. Apologies for absence:

2. Minutes of the meeting held on 27 November

4b) Age Discrimination Act – should read “Mary Ward allow a concession if the state pension is the principal source of income” not only source.

3. Matters arising

4e) Employers – Sonja responded to a question about what types of training employers are interested in, and reported that we are currently delivering English classes to staff at the Royal Marsden Hospital and the Holiday Inn; Spanish to an insurance company in Wimbledon and IT training to 2 companies, one in Mitcham and one on the Kimpton Industrial Estate in Sutton.

We have appointed Gaynor Bray as our Business Development Manager whose job it is to make contact with companies and tell them what we can offer. We have a leaflet and we are a member of the new Borough Business Forum which arranges events for employers.

It was noted that there is a potential market in training primary school teachers to teach languages.

We have recently won centre approval to run computing qualifications accredited by Microsoft, which is offered by flexible online learning which might be of interest to employers.

Courses are not free (except currently for English as a Second Language) and the Government is expecting that colleges will raise income by employer engagement to compensate for cuts in funding.

It was acknowledged that there are barriers to employer engagement – cost, staff time and concerns that, once trained, staff will leave.

12. Cancelled Courses – Bridget asked about the pattern of cancellation and it was agreed to bring some information to the next meeting.

4.Funding, Fees and Programme Planning

Margaret confirmed that fees will rise in September due to further cuts to our budget and the requirement by the LSC that colleges collect a certain percentage of the true cost of running classes (i.e. not just the direct tutor costs) in fee income. Currently, this percentage is 35% and this will rise to 40% next year and to 50% after that.

The possible removal of the over-60 concession due to the Age Discrimination Act is under discussion and a decision will be made by the Governors.

In order to minimise the effect of this fee increase, and as discussed with the Student Focus Group last time, most departments are breaking down the 32-week courses into smaller modules. Art and Craft, for example, are following a 2 x 16-week model or 23 + 9 weeks. Languages are following an 18 week + 14 week model.

Bridget asked if a certificate could be issued for non-accredited classes to prove learning is taking place, and it was confirmed that a college certificate of attendance is available.

A suggestion was made to offer a £5 voucher if enrolling onto more than one course.

It was suggested that a letter from the Principal informing students about fee changes would be beneficial.

It would be interesting to know how other nations fund adult education.

5.Accommodation/Future Developments

a)Sutton Centre – building work has started to create 4 new classrooms at Sutton Centre and move the dance/exercise hall upstairs. It has not been as noisy as expected and has not caused too much disruption to classes.

b)Nonsuch – the loss of Nonsuch Mansion did cause the loss of some students. Although classes were relocated, some failed. Elizabeth pointed out that parking fees are off-putting for Sutton classes, and some art classes have continued privately.

c)Carew Manor – will close in September, due to developments at the school. We have been there over 30 years and it is sad to lose it. Classes have been informed and most will be relocated.

d)Wilsons School – we have been offered one evening a week at Wilsons which we are accepting. This will be a good venue as it is on the edge of the Roundshaw Estate and will enable us to encourage residents of the estate to come to classes. Elizabeth enquired about the use of the Phoenix Centre on Roundshaw. We do, in fact, run some outreach computing classes and Information, Advice and Guidance sessions there, and are developing closer links with the Library service.

6.Complaints Analysis Autumn 06 – distributed for interest.

7.SAR – Cross-College Report – defer

8.Equality and Diversity – Lindy addressed the group and explained that the Disability Discrimination Act is the new part of the legislation. A scheme needs to be written for Disability Race Equality. The main change to the legislation is the emphasis from ‘must not discriminate’ to ‘must actively promote’ equality.

Lindy is writing a draft scheme and action plans. The Equality and Diversity committee meets termly. There is student representation.

Any policy or plan now has to be assessed for E&D impact to assess whether we are promoting equality and accessibility for both students and staff.

The scheme will first be approved by the Governors, and then should be published and on the website and in different formats.

9.Health and Safety – none

10.Any Other Business

a)Dorothy reported that students are asked to phone in if they cannot attend, but the messages are not passed on to the tutors (Sutton Centre). Margaret would look into.

b)Compliment – Elizabeth wanted to thank Angie in the crèche who was most helpful when the lift was out of order.

11.Date of Next Meeting - Tuesday, 26 June 2007