

MONITORING VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Name of Provider: SCOLA
Date of visit: 14 June 2007

Context

This monitoring visit follows the inspection of Sutton College of Learning for Adults (SCOLA), in March 2006, at which overall effectiveness of provision was judged to be satisfactory. Leadership and management, including arrangements for quality improvement and equality of opportunity, were judged to be good. Provision was good in leisure, travel and tourism, and outstanding in retail and commercial enterprise. It was satisfactory in information and communications technology (ICT), in arts, media and publishing, in languages, literature and culture and in preparation for life and work.

Achievement and standards

What developments have taken place since the previous inspection to improve success rates including overall rates and achievement rates?	Reasonable progress
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Success rates continue to improve since the previous inspection. Overall success rates on long courses have improved from 57% in 2004-05 to 65% in 2005-06. Overall success rates on short courses remained largely static at 68% in 2005-06. The number of learners recruited onto accredited programmes continues to rise. The college recognises the need to further improve success rates on long courses in ICT, art and design, languages and skills for life courses. Pass rates on accredited courses remain high at 92% in 2005-06.

Overall retention rates continue to improve and on non-accredited courses were 89% in 2005-06. On accredited programmes, overall retention rates were 85% in 2005-06. In-year data show levels of retention to be further improved in 2006-07. Currently there is no overall aggregation of achievement rates for non-accredited programmes.

SCOLA has clearly identified issues and put into place good strategies to further improve achievement and standards. A wide range of performance data helps staff to analyse areas of underachievement and take appropriate action. Strategies include a strong focus on improving attendance, encouraging learners on ICT and skills for

life courses to enter for accreditation, as well as the introduction of new qualifications to better meet the needs of learners, for example BTEC courses in art and design. The college recognises the need to further improve systematic and timely initial assessment to ensure appropriate enrolment on courses. It has yet to explore the contribution of assessment practice in lessons to support improvements in achievements. A pilot to improve diagnostic assessment has been undertaken and the college recognises the need to extend and further improve the provision of additional learning support, including support for 16-18 learners on accredited courses, who have been identified as vulnerable learners.

What progress has taken place to improve the recording of achievement on non-accredited courses and in embedding recognising and recording progress and achievement?	Reasonable progress
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SCOLA has made reasonable progress to develop processes to recognise and record learners' progress and achievement. The previous inspection found that there was insufficient use of individual learning plans to guide learners' progress and achievement. Work has been undertaken to help learners recognise the value of recording achievement and tutors value the contribution that recognising and recording progress and achievement makes to helping learners acknowledge their own achievements. Staff development has been undertaken and tutors are encouraged to use digital technology to demonstrate achievement. In one area; sports, fitness and health, there has been significant progress in the use of information and learning technology (ILT) to support personalisation of the curriculum.

The college is starting to develop a quality cycle for recognising and recording progress and achievement processes. Moderation of individual learning plans, piloted in skills for life will be extended across the college from September 2007. The college plans to start using its management information system (MIS) over the next year to record and produce summary achievement data. Tutors increasingly understand the need to improve the use of assessment information to support progress monitoring. Developments include the use of vocationally relevant assessment to support individual planning of learning. The quality of the content of individual learning records continues to differ considerably across the college. There is little qualitative information in some learning plans with few comments about the development of knowledge and skills and little detail about learning.

SCOLA recognises areas for improvement but the organisational action plan to improve the rigour of recognising and recording progress and achievement has not been updated recently nor set within an overall quality cycle.

What actions are taking place to improve attendance rates particularly in areas identified with poor attendance during the previous inspection?	Insufficient progress
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Attendance rates remain an area for improvement. In-year data indicates overall attendance is 68%, an improvement of 2% since the previous year. Since the previous inspection, the college has introduced measures to improve attendance rates including regular checks by centre managers and staff. Weekly reports are now produced for all courses and the monitoring of attendance has now been integrated with the management of quality across the college. Most areas have made good improvements in attendance rates in the current year, although the recording of enrolment in skills for life provision continues to impact on overall rates.

Quality of provision

What progress has taken place to improve the quality of teaching and learning?	Reasonable progress
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SCOLA has made reasonable progress to improve the quality of teaching and learning. Overall teaching and learning was judged to be satisfactory or better at the previous inspection. Since then, there has been emphasis on greater and more effective use of ILT in lessons, integration of skills for life support and improvements in assessment practice. Developments are supported by a good range of staff development including opportunities to share good practice. SCOLA continues to strengthen teaching and learning.

The college has revised the arrangements for the observation of teaching and learning (OTL), introduced support systems for teachers whose lessons are judged to be inadequate, and support to further improve satisfactory teaching and learning. The revised system has included a focus on assessing the quality of initial assessment and individual learning plans. Staff are supported to gain teaching qualifications. Currently, 10% of all staff are without some level of teaching qualification. The increased use of subject specialists to conduct observations is valued by tutors. Moderation is well established. The system is generally rigorous and clearly linked to action plans and staff development. However, there is insufficient information about the attainment of learners and its impact on grading. The college's grade profile indicates an increase in the number of good or better observation grades.

<p>What progress has taken place to make better use of ILT to raise standards and improve the quality of the learning experience?</p>	<p>Significant progress</p>
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The previous inspection found that learning resources, while available, were not sufficiently used in some areas of learning. Since the previous inspection SCOLA has made significant progress in the development and use of ILT resources and has realistic plans to improve the resources even further. The number of interactive whiteboards has increased and operating systems are more sophisticated. Many staff have been trained appropriately and the increased use of ILT is monitored effectively. Some elements of a virtual learning environment are now in place, including a wide range of learning materials and links to external resources. This is widely used by staff and learners. SCOLA has increased the availability of other ILT equipment, such as digital cameras for recording learners' progress and digital projectors linked to laptops. The development of ILT has been well considered, based on the increasing confidence developed in staff through staff training and stronger technical support. Future plans include the development of a full virtual learning environment.

<p>What progress is the college making to better meet the needs and interests of all learners? In particular, how is the college improving responsiveness to employers; and what is the impact of partnerships to attract new learners and more clearly align the college to local needs and national priorities.</p>	<p>Reasonable progress</p>
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SCOLA has made reasonable progress in developing relationships with employers. It was recognised in the previous inspection that SCOLA has good partnerships which result in widening participation in the borough. The need to work more effectively with local employers has been recognised and a suitable post established. The revenue generated from full-cost provision has increased significantly over the last year. SCOLA has established links with the local chamber of commerce and works closely with the local authority economic regeneration team. SCOLA has a clear understanding of the requirement to develop its accredited provision to increase private sector employer engagement. However, this year the number of client employers will remain similar to the previous year. SCOLA has continued to develop its work with public sector partners and increase opportunities for residents of Sutton. For example two learning centres have been developed in deprived wards in partnership with the local council for voluntary services.

Leadership and management

<p>What progress has taken place to improve the use of quality improvement mechanisms and particularly management information and data to monitor performance and raise standards?</p>	<p>Significant progress</p>
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SCOLA has made significant progress in developing MIS and data. The previous inspection identified that much data was available on topics such as the recruitment and performance of different groups of learners. Although data was used satisfactorily by senior managers, it was not used sufficiently well by curriculum managers to plan provision or to analyse retention and achievement. The presentation and analysis of data has improved as has its use and understanding at curriculum level. Detailed analysis is now provided for a broad range of groups and indicators. For example, more frequent analysis and reporting of attendance allows better targeting of learners at risk of leaving. Data is analysed and discussed at departmental level each term and it is used to set targets. The use of data from other similar adult and community learning providers supports rigorous and challenging target-setting to improve overall performance. Although analysis of accredited course success rates is provided each term, SCOLA has identified the need to improve the recording of success on non-accredited courses.

<p>A new system for performance management was being piloted at the time of the previous inspection. What is the impact of this system?</p>	<p>Reasonable progress</p>
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SCOLA has made reasonable progress in implementing a new performance management review system. In 2006, inspectors found that the system was satisfactory. Key staff had an annual performance review which was a largely developmental process. Insufficient attention was paid to setting specific targets. Performance targets were not sufficiently linked to key performance indicators. The new system, which was piloted by the senior management team, is now used for all established staff. Staff now complete a more detailed self-assessment. There are improved systems to identify and provide training and development. Reviews are now carried out by line managers in a suitably evaluative process. The system is moving to an annual review and the number of reviews undertaken has increased. SCOLA recognises that there is variable quality across departments. There is a need to improve individuals' target-setting and the analysis of results. Part-time tutors are monitored through regular checks on attendance and retention and achievement reports. The analysis of OTL has improved and the outcomes are now monitored. This leads to appropriate development where required. A review of the performance management system is due to be undertaken in July 2007.

How self-critical and effective is self-assessment and development planning?	Reasonable progress
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The self-assessment process is generally effective. Since the previous inspection there is better use of data to inform judgements. The quality improvement plan is detailed and includes some realistic targets. However, some outcomes are insufficiently specific and difficult to measure. The 2005-06 self-assessment report does not provide overall judgements for achievement and standards, quality of provision and capacity to improve.