



Access and Participation Statement 2023-2024

Scholars School System (UK Curriculum and Accreditation Body)

Access and participation statement (2023/24)

Background and Ambitions

Scholars School System (SSS) is a registered charity (1153197) wholly committed to adding value to under-represented groups by engaging them in higher education opportunities. The primary aim of SSS as an institution is to increase access and participation amongst under-represented groups in Birmingham, Manchester and London. This is the primary strategy of the College. The SSS mission is “Education for All” and creating learning environments within which every student can achieve their full potential.

SSS believes that further and higher education is the most important milestone in building a strong foundation in transition from education to work. The College strives towards creating a stimulating learning environment for students that can help to cultivate good work habits and ethics and promotes focus and motivation in life to achieve their goals.

A major priority has been to continue to raise the profile of the College in the local and regional community by offering Higher National Diploma and degree courses to everyone who can benefit from these opportunities working in partnership with Leeds Trinity University to provide these opportunities.

SSS also works in partnership with local employers and chambers of commerce including to provide work experience and volunteering opportunities for our students. We are working on a range of initiatives to increase the number of enrolments from Europe and the local community.

At SSS, there are ambitious goals for the future and a strong vision to lead the way in the region and the country. As the College higher education facilities continue to grow, SSS aims to be a leading provider of flexible, affordable and career-relevant university education in disciplines of value to the local and regional economy and its residents that will equip them for roles and types of work of value to them and their local and regional communities.

We currently have a diverse range of students from predominantly low-income and socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds. With a goal of increasing the representation, progression, and success of BAME students at our campuses. On average, the breakdown by country of origin for Business students is approximately 0.5% UK, 56% European, 39% Asian, 4.4% African.

Target groups

In line with its mission of “Education for All” its primary focus is on people who are already working and wish to go back to education to improve their career prospects as well as those who may have been driven away from education due to external or internal factors. Scholars School System believe that higher education is the most important milestone in building a strong foundation in transition from education to (new forms) of rewarding work. Our students are therefore typically mature learners (average age of those enrolled on HE provision as at 1 September 2021 is currently 35 years) with appropriate work/life experience. They are predominantly from the Black Asian and Minority Ethnic community with a significant proportion from the Asian community which is representative of the local catchment areas.

As at November 2023, there are 3000 learners from Year 0 to Level 6, which will increase in 2024 with the introduction of Level 7. Our courses are currently running on three intakes (September, January and May). The majority of our learners are also first generation, who have completed their primary and secondary education in their home countries.

College Values

As an organisation, SSS shares a common set of values across the whole organisation. These help to define the College:

- students and the College community are at the heart of the organisation
- SSS fosters excellence, innovation and creativity
- SSS celebrates diversity and inclusion and the removal of barriers to success
- SSS has high expectations of all staff, students and partners.

The strategic aims and objectives of the College is widening access and participation i.e. widening access and participation is the principal objective of SSS as the average age of the learner and the ethnicity profile including gender mix attest. The growth in number of students while maintaining a consistent profile (e.g. average age has remained over 35 since 2019) has been supported by an effective outreach and marketing activity. Effective and focused support – both academic and non-academic is a key attribute of the College in order to facilitate retention, progression and attainment once students are with us.

The promotion of educational opportunities is a partnership between SSS and our UKHE provider, Leeds Trinity University. The university is instrumental in monitoring quality and ensuring parity of experience between SSS learners and those of the providers. LTU is supportive of SSS in its quest to bring opportunities to residents of an area with low higher education participation rates. Learners are predominantly mature black, Asian and minority ethnic in origin. The university is supportive of SSS ambitions and keen to identify and rectify any equality gaps within sub-groups in relation to access, success and progression. SSS is aware of the varying needs of different groups and is keen to disaggregate black, Asian and minority ethnic students into individual groups so as to focus appropriate academic and non-academic support in appropriate ways, including academic skills and tutorial support.

Completion rates are also monitored closely by the college and the university. SSS is mindful of the fact that whilst assessment of performance shows fair access for students from under-represented groups continuation and attainment rates continue to be a focus as the number of learners achieving the highest grades is not as good as it could be. This is a focus for classroom activity and all aspects of learning and teaching, and is closely monitored by the two partner institutions. Raising attainment levels is thus an outcome-focused target for SSS, in collaboration with the

university. This focused strategic activity has been identified by the provider to collectively secure continuous improvement in outcomes for students by improving the level of success and continuation amongst SSS learners. The College has identified strategies to help tackle this as outlined below and will work with LTU to set a series of collaborative targets against which the success of this strategy will be judged.

Widening participation priorities and associated actions for period 2023-2024

In order to achieve our goals including maintaining widening access and participation and improving continuation and attainment a number of actions are in hand and form the priority for 2023-2024 and beyond.

Continuation of a commitment to attract a high proportion of BAME applications. This commitment is consistent with SSS's values, which include providing a varied and vibrant learning environment for all students. Using print media, social media, TV advertising, and electronic campaigns, SSS's marketing techniques are thorough and transparent. SSS works directly with local stakeholders to bring in applications, including JCPs, community centres, schools, colleges, faith-based organisations, and local companies. A committed team of employees is responsible for marketing and recruitment, which resulted in 1200 applications for our May intake.

Additional actions include:

- Tutorial and additional academic skills support to improve retention and attainment
- Enhancing levels of active learning to promote levels of attainment
- Timetabling and curriculum organisation strategies to support successful completion

Effective and Targeted Recruitment Strategy

SSS has developed an effective recruitment strategy, managed by a team of experienced staff who oversee both the recruitment and admissions process which includes a supportive interview process. In order to maximise opportunities for under-represented groups to join the College, SSS offers a number of entry point spread across the year and has introduced a new intake point of May (since 2022). The college monitors the retention and progression of those learners to ensure the recruitment strategy is translating into desired retention, progression and attainment outcomes for them.

Tutorial and additional academic skills support to improve retention and attainment

In line with SSS's policy of "Education for All" we realise the need for additional support for some of our students who had been out of mainstream educational system for a while. Academic Skills Department offers support to our students with one to one and small group sessions in order to get the best out of them academically. Small workshops are delivered throughout the academic year. To support our learners' academic journey, we also provide soft skills workshops that will not only improve their confidence but also enhance their chances of obtaining higher skilled jobs that match their qualifications.

Enhancing levels of active learning to promote levels of attainment

As already highlighted the College strives towards creating a stimulating learning environment for students that promotes focus and motivation in life to achieve their goals. To support the improvement of attainment towards the higher grades the College is promoting and developing its

use of active or activity-led learning environments and teaching methods while continuing to refine what it has learnt through the pandemic by utilising technology to enable and facilitate learning. The college has adopted the following definition of blended learning in its teaching and learning as provided by Garrison & Kanuka (2004)¹: “blended learning is the thoughtful integration of classroom face-to-face learning experiences with online learning experiences” (p.96). In doing so it is committed to all ‘live’ teaching (in-person or online) being at least 50% active or activity-led with the thoughtful use of relevant learning technologies to facilitate this. In doing so the college notes that active learning is no panacea and that active learning can take different forms according to need and that research shows students learn more when they are engaged in a mixture of active learning, inquiry and instruction (Harrington and Zakrajsek, 2017²). The college will monitor both the implementation and effectiveness of this strategy through regular learning walks and teaching observation processes promoting a culture of evidence-informed, peer-supported development of teaching, as well as through early indicators of student engagement and levels of attainment.

Timetabling and curriculum organisation strategies to support successful completion

Most of our learners are parents who are employed. Our timetabling approach accommodates block teaching days over the course of two days and the use of VLE activities to accommodate learners and allow them flexibility with their learning throughout the week. To maximise learner engagement and self-motivation, we are delivering learning through a three-phase applied learning model whereby learners are required to complete a pre-learning activity followed by live active learning with the lecturer, and finally engaging in feedback and topic comprehension. We periodically monitor high risk students to provide support as they require. We are also working with our partners to re-model the current VLE so that it allows lecturers to improve monitoring of each individual learner.

Evaluation strategy

To shape the way our courses are delivered, students are able to evaluate through different mechanisms (Student Experience Surveys, Module Evaluation Questionnaires) where they provide feedback on their experiences with each module. We also have Students Reps allocated for each group allowing learners to provide comments or raise questions about a range of topics, including instruction, teaching resources, Moodle use, and submissions. This contributes significantly to improvements in the delivery of the curriculum and improving student results.

Module content, assessments and teaching delivery are also evaluated by Course Leads and Lecturers at the end of each semester, with the aim to improve and enhance the delivery and teaching for the next cohorts. These evaluations are also discussed with partners with the view to make improvements and adjustments to enhance the student experience. In addition, Lecturer performance is periodically reviewed via both internal and external observations, with emphasis upon effectiveness of learning, inclusivity and student-centred learning environment, and ensuring

¹ Garrison, D. R., & Kanuka, H. (2004). Blended learning: Uncovering its transformative potential in higher education. *Internet and Higher Education*, 7, 95–105.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.iheduc.2004.02.001>

² Harrington, C. and Zakrajsek, T. (2017), *Dynamic Lecturing: Research-Based Strategies to Enhance Lecture Effectiveness*. Sterling, VA: Stylus Publishing.

that learning goals and outcomes are achieved. Through peer-observations and CPD workshops, best practice is ongoingly shared across lecturing teams.

Control Panel

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