

SCHOOL OF ORIENTAL AND AFRICAN STUDIES

GOVERNING BODY

Friday 12 December 2003

MINUTES

Mr J F Taylor (Chair)
Professor R Finnegan (Vice-Chair)
Mr R D A Pick (Honorary Treasurer)
Professor C J Bundy (Director and Principal)
The Lord Bagri
Mr A Bhanji
Professor J Brown
Mr P Collecott
Dr P Deans
Professor G Furniss
Sir Joseph Hotung
Sir David John
Lady Judge
Professor M A Knibb
Professor P Robb
Ms E Wright
Professor S Bassnett
Mr D W Brewer
Professor S Chan
Professor E J Croll
Mr M French
Professor M Hockx
Dr K D Howard
Mr A Joumaa
Dr Nasser D Khalili*
Professor B Pimlott
Professor B R Tomlinson

In attendance: Mr F L Dabell (Clerk to the Governing Body)
Mr A Keeble (Director of Finance & Administration)
Ms J Halliday (Minute secretary)

*Those marked with an asterisk were unable to be present.

Presentation on the SOAS brand

Before the meeting, the Governing Body received a presentation on the SOAS brand from Mr John Harris-Burland, whose consultancy firm was working with the School on strengthening the SOAS brand.

10 Membership

The Governing Body welcomed a new member, Professor Susan Bassnett. Mr Michael French was also welcomed and the Governing Body confirmed his appointment as a member. It was noted that Mr French might take over as Chair of the Finance & General Purposes Committee, once Mr Robert Pick had relinquished this role, and that therefore Mr French would be invited to attend meetings of the Finance & General Purposes Committee as an observer.

Sir David John informed members that Balfour Beatty (whose Board he chaired) had recently acquired 90% of the shares in Mansells, who were contracted with the School, and this was noted by Governing Body.

Governing Body extended its congratulations to Sir Joseph Hotung who had recently been awarded an honorary doctorate of the University of London.

11 Minutes

The minutes of the meetings held on 13 June and 10 October 2003 were **APPROVED** and signed.

12 Matters arising

12.1 Matters arising from the minutes of the meeting held on 13 June 2003

12.1.1 SOAS in the media (minute 33.1)

The Governing Body received a tabled draft brochure from the Vice-Principal (External Affairs) and noted that the brochure was organised in terms of staff expertise according to region. The Vice-Principal (External Affairs) indicated that she would be inserting an introductory section to introduce readers to the School more generally. The Governing Body also noted examples of additional pamphlets available promoting the School's regional centres. Members of Governing Body congratulated the Vice-Principal (External Affairs) for the production of this booklet and noted that it would also be put on the website.

12.1.2 QAA Institutional Audit (minute 34(iii))

The full report of the audit had now been published and would be circulated to the Governing Body for information.

12.2 Matters arising from the minutes of the meeting held on 10 October 2003

12.2.1 Student retention (minute 2(v))

The Governing Body received two tabled papers from the Dean of the Faculty of Arts & Humanities, who was taking the academic lead in student retention matters.

The Governing Body was pleased to note the progress which had been made to address student retention issues, although it was noted that SOAS had in the last returns to HEFCE the highest drop-out rate (12%) of the pre-1992 higher education institutions. It was noted that the School needed to get down to 7% or 8% to be among other pre-1992 institutions, although it was noted that its benchmark of 8% was one of the highest of the pre-1992 institutions. The benchmark of 8% from low participation neighbourhoods had been achieved but that the measure had recently been changed. Members of the Governing Body were pleased to note the encouraging trend in meeting student retention targets and noted that the picture so far for the September 2003 intake seemed encouraging as – bearing in mind higher intake numbers – early drop-out rates did not appear to be higher than before. Firm figures would be available in early January 2004 and members asked that this information to be circulated with the minutes.

12.2.2 Governing Body (minute 9)

The School officers and the Chair of Governing Body had discussed further the proposal that the Governing Body should normally meet four times a year and recommended to Governing Body that it should remain with three meetings but that a fourth could be convened if necessary. This was **AGREED**.

13 Director and Principal's Report

The Governing Body received a report [Appendix A] from the Director and Principal who highlighted the following points:

(i) *Student numbers*

The provisional numbers were noted and it was indicated that these would be very close to the final numbers submitted to HESA on 1 December. The Governing Body asked their thanks and appreciation be passed on to all members of academic and support staff who had achieved such high levels of student enrolment.

(ii) *Financial considerations*

The Governing Body noted that the enhanced enrolment figures would translate into enhanced fee income, although it was recognised that these figures did not guarantee the medium or long term financial security of the School.

(iii) *Examination results*

The pleasing examination results were noted.

(iv) *Research excellence*

The Governing Body noted with great pleasure the strong achievements of members of academic staff in research excellence, especially in the achievement of competitive research awards. The Governing Body warmly congratulated all those concerned.

(v) *Strategic Priorities Team: Report and process*

It was noted that detailed consideration was being given to the SPT report and recommendations as they arose would be reported to Governing Body.

(vi) *The Higher Education Bill*

It was noted that the School awaited the outcome of the parliamentary process on the Higher Education Bill and would then

consider its position on variable tuition fees. It was noted that the Finance & General Purposes Committee had agreed to consider the proposal that international students be allowed to pay fees in instalments rather than one up-front payment.

(vii) *The Bloomsbury Consortium*

It was noted that HEFCE had awarded £80,000 to the Bloomsbury Consortium (six of the specialist colleges of the University of London on the Bloomsbury precinct) to appoint consultants to conduct a feasibility study, assessing the potential for collaboration and co-operation between the colleges. A statement of the principles of the collaboration was attached to the Director's report. It was noted that the Southern Universities Management Services (SUMS) would be undertaking the consultancy for this study. It was intended that an interim report identifying areas for possible collaboration would be completed by March 2004 and a final report would be available in the second week of June 2004.

(viii) *Estate Matters*

The Governing Body noted with pleasure that the refurbished main lecture theatre – The Khalili Lecture Theatre – had been opened on 20 October 2003. A separate project, the entrance foyer, had recently been refurbished and procedures for access control were being identified.

(ix) *National pay award for staff*

It was noted that the national negotiating forum had recently recommended pay awards which had been accepted by the unions representing support staff but had not been accepted by those representing academic and academic-related staff. Following advice, and in common with other higher education institutions, the School had therefore implemented payment for support staff.

(x) *Academic posts*

The Director and Principal reported that Executive Board had proposed the approval of eleven academic posts, bearing in mind what could be afforded, where staffing needed to be strengthened in view of increased student numbers, and in line with strategic directions proposed by the Strategic Priorities Team. Some of the posts were replacements for retirements and some were new posts. There would be some risk in this expenditure if the School failed to sustain its student recruitment numbers. As the total cost of this expenditure exceeded that which Executive Board had authority to approve, Governing Body was asked to delegate authority to the Chair of Finance & General Purposes Committee to approve this expenditure, and this was **AGREED**.

(xi) *Honorary degree*

The Governing Body **ENDORSED** the recommendation of the Executive Board and the Chair of the Honorary Fellowships and Degrees Committee to propose to the Honorary Degrees Committee of the University of London to award an honorary degree of the University of London to Dr Lisbet Rausing, in view of her academic standing, her links with colleges of the University of London (the Courtauld Institute, UCL and SOAS) and for her creative philanthropy in support of research and scholarship in higher education.

14 **Annual Accounts**

14.1 *Annual accounts 2002/03*

The Honorary Treasurer and Chair of Finance & General Purposes Committee presented the Treasurer's Report and annual accounts for 2002/03 [Appendix B]. It was noted that the annual accounts had been scrutinised by the Audit Committee prior to being presented to and approved by Finance & General Purposes Committee. It was noted that total operating income had increased by 7.58% compared with the previous year, whereas total expenditure had increased by 3.59%. It was noted that the position before charges for the depreciation of buildings was an operating deficit of £355,000 in the year ended 31 July 2003, compared with the operating deficit of £1,685,000 operating deficit in the previous year. The 2002/03 operating deficit was more favourable than had been expected at the meeting of the Governing Body in October 2003. This had been partly due to austerity measures the School had put in place with regard to staffing and partly due to successful student recruitment. The School is therefore currently on course to fulfil the financial objectives of breaking even at the operating level in 2003/4 and thereafter reaching break-even on an historical cost basis. The Governing Body was encouraged to note this position and congratulated all those in the School who had worked hard to achieve this position, and notably the Director of Finance and Administration and his staff. The Governing Body **RESOLVED** to approve the annual accounts for 2002/03.

14.2 *External Auditors 2003/04*

The Governing Body **RESOLVED** to appoint Deloitte & Touche as External Auditors for the School for 2003/04.

15 **Audit**

16.1 *The Annual Report of the Audit Committee*

The Governing Body received and **APPROVED** the annual report of the Audit Committee for the year 2002/03 [Appendix C].

16.2 Minutes of the Audit Committee meeting 20.11.03

The Governing Body received the minutes of the meeting of the Audit Committee held on 20 November 2003 [Appendix D].

16 Finance

The Governing Body received a paper detailing variations to budget and budget validation 2003/04 [Appendix E]. The Governing Body was pleased to note a modest operating surplus of £1,225, noting that this met the target of break-even at the operating level in 2003/04. It was noted that the target for 2004/05 was to break-even on an historical cost basis. It was noted that a forecast budget for 2004/05 would be presented to the next meeting of the Finance & General Purposes Committee and the Governing Body. It was noted that these forecasts were based on the reasonable assumption that student numbers would hold for this and next year and beyond. The School would have to suffer a dramatic decrease in numbers to go back into operating deficit; there was therefore confidence that the break-even positions could be achieved and maintained. The Governing Body asked for student numbers and student retention numbers to be presented to its next meeting.

17 Governance

17.1 Standing Orders

The Governing Body received a paper on Standing Orders from the Clerk, who had been considering the Standing Orders in order to meet HEFCE's advice that Governing Bodies defined clearly which areas they wished to reserve for themselves to determine [Appendix F]. The Clerk's proposals were noted and members were invited to send comments to him by email, so that revised proposals could be presented to the next meeting of the Governing Body for consideration. The Governing Body asked that all paragraphs of the revised draft be presented at the next stage. It was noted that paragraph (xii) would need further drafting work on it to ensure responsibilities indicated in the covering paper (1-4) were explicit. Additional amendments proposed were

- (xii) (e) – to add '...within one year'
- (xii) paragraph (l) and (m) – these paragraphs needed to be more explicit

The Governing Body looked forward to the next version of the proposed amendments to the Standing Orders.

17.2 Revised Model Statute

The Governing Body noted the issue of the Revised Model Statute, as indicated in the paper and awaited further information from the Clerk once he had received a response back from the Clerk to the Privy Council on the SOAS situation [Appendix G].

17.3 Change of name for the Politics Department

The Governing Body **APPROVED** the change of name for the Politics Department to become the Department of Politics and International Studies [Appendix H], noting that this name better reflected the department's interests.

18 Estate Matters

18.1 Report on Estate Matters

The Governing Body received a report on Estate matters [Appendix I], noting the developments indicated in the paper. Members noted (from a presentation on the SOAS brand which had taken place in the East Block) that the East Block was nearing completion and that the development had gone well and was being delivered on budget. The Governing Body noted with pleasure that HRH The Princess Royal, Chancellor of the University of London, had accepted the invitation to open the East Block in late March.

18.2 Report on the Pentonville Road project

The Governing Body received a report from the Clerk on the Pentonville Road project but noted that the situation had significantly changed since he had

drafted the main paper [Appendix J]. The Shaftesbury Student Housing (SSH) should have exchanged contracts with the Royal Bank of Scotland the previous Wednesday, but that SSH had withdrawn from the project at the last minute. The Clerk and officers of the School had been seeking to identify another party to take the place of SSH and he was hopeful that another housing association would be able to manage the operation and that the signing of the project with the Royal Bank of Scotland could proceed. The Governing Body confirmed that the Clerk and officers of the School had the authority to conclude matters, unless there were changes in the contractual arrangements, in which case these would need the approval of the Finance & General Purposes Committee.

19 London Middle East Institute (LMEI) at SOAS

The Governing Body received a report on the relationship between the School and the LMEI [Appendix K]. It was noted that the paper was a descriptive statement written by the Director of the LMEI, Professor Robert Springborg, for the Board of the LMEI. SOAS Middle East academics working with the LMEI were employed by SOAS and that degree work remained the responsibility of SOAS. There could be some reputational risk in the relationship but this was minimised by having the Director and Principal as Chair of the Board and four SOAS staff in total as members of the Board. Members noted from paragraph 6 (bold type) that the LMEI could appoint academic staff on a part-time fixed term basis but that all appointment procedures for academic staff were in line with SOAS appointment procedures. Governing Body noted that the LMEI could not appoint staff from the SOAS budget and that any down-turn in LMEI activities would impact on the LMEI's not the School's budget.

It was **AGREED** that this paper should be referred to the School's Executive Board for consideration.

It was noted from the second paragraph of the paper that 'development and fund-raising activities of the LMEI must be coordinated of the SOAS Development Office'. As Chair of the newly reformed Development Committee, Lady Judge gave a brief oral report on progress of these activities to date. It was noted that there was to be an inaugural dinner inviting people from community and business interests and that this would be hosted by Lord Howe in the House of Lords. Lady Judge intended to set up a Business Advisory Board and the former Chair of Shell, Sir Mark Moody Stuart, had agreed to chair this board. The new Director of Development employed by SOAS was working with Lady Judge on the project. Members of Governing Body were asked to send any proposals for this area of work to the Clerk or Lady Judge.

20 Value for Money

The Governing Body received a report on the annual Value for Money exercise undertaken by the School [Appendix L].

21 Academic Board

The Governing Body received the minutes of the meeting of Academic Board held on 19 November 2003 [Appendix M].

22 Finance & General Purposes Committee

The Governing Body received the minutes of the meeting of the Finance & General Purposes Committee held on 18 November 2003 [Appendix N].

23 Any other business

24.1 Valediction

The Governing Body noted that this was the last meeting of Mr Peter Collecott, the representative from the Foreign & Commonwealth Office on the Board, as he had been appointed to a senior diplomatic post abroad. The Governing Body thanked him for his contributions to the work of the School and wished him well. It was noted that he had sent the nomination for his successor on the Governing Body to be Chair.

24 Date of next meeting

The next meeting of the Governing Body would be on Friday 19 March 2004 at 11.00am.