

SCHOOL OF ORIENTAL AND AFRICAN STUDIES

GOVERNING BODY

Friday 23 March 2007

MINUTES

Lady Barbara Thomas Judge (Chair)
Professor M A Knibb (Vice-Chair)
Mr M French (Honorary Treasurer)
Professor P Webley (Director & Principal)
The Lord Bagri
Professor S Bassnett*
Mr A Bhanji*
Sir David Brewer
Professor J Brown*
Professor S Chan*
Professor C Clunas
Professor E J Croll*
Professor R Finnegan
Mr J Footitt
Mr J Hughes-Hallett*
Professor B Ingham

Sir David John*
Professor D N Khalili*
Mr K Kutay
Professor D Latchman*
Mr P Lea-Wilson
Mr A Lloyd*
Dr D Martinez*
Mr R Pick
Professor P Robb
Ms C Solomon
Professor B R Tomlinson
Dr L Welchman
Ms E Wright
In attendance: Mr F L Dabell (Clerk to the Governing Body)
Professor M Hutt (Dean of Languages and Cultures)
Mr G Appleby (Director of Finance)
Ms S Page (Registrar)
Ms J Halliday (Deputy Secretary)*

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

26 Minutes

The minutes of the meetings held on 15 December 2006 were **APPROVED** and signed, subject to the deletion of the final sentence of the revised Appendix A from 15 December 2006.

27 Chair's Action

The following actions taken by the Chair since the last meeting were endorsed:

- (i) The agreement that two of the current Students' Union sabbaticals should be allowed to run for a second term in office.
- (ii) The appointment of Mr Tez Quirk as the independent person to investigate any appeals under the Students' Union Constitution Complaints Procedure.

It was noted the Mr Quirk had recently retired having been Secretary at the Courtauld's Institute and Wye College. With regard to the

Students' Union elections, the Chair congratulated Clare Solomon on being re-elected.

28 Director & Principal's Report

Governing Body received a report from the Director and Principal [Appendix A].

Arising from the report:

i) *Review of research libraries special funding*

It was reported that the review would concentrate on external use of the SOAS library. The first part of this review was for School officers to undertake a self-assessment of services provided to external users and the level of take-up.

ii) *Additional Student Numbers*

It was noted that a bid had been made for additional numbers and that consideration was being given to how to approach bidding for additional numbers for 2008-09.

iii) *QAA Institutional Audit*

It was reported that the Auditors had visited the School during the week of 19 – 23 March and were completing their visit later in the day. It was hard to judge the outcome as the Auditors had expressed concern about the School's slow response to the last report and further concerns regarding staff induction, training and performance review.

iv) *Wye*

Discussions were continuing with Imperial College and there were two major issues requiring resolution. The first was the possible redundancy cost that might arise in the future (five years) when the Wye distance learning administration might be moved to Bloomsbury. The second issue was that now that it had been determined that the MBA distance learning programme would remain at Imperial, it was necessary to negotiate a contract for the provision of the administrative services for the Imperial MBA. In addition, there was a need to hold discussions with the University of London external system to ensure a smooth transition of the Wye Programmes to SOAS.

v) *Development*

It was reported that one new member of staff had been recruited to the Development Office from the London Business School.

vi) *New Appointments*

It was reported that making appointments in a timely way for the RAE was proving challenging, both because of London costs and counter offers being made by existing employers. However, some good appointments had been made in Anthropology from a very strong field, with one of the candidates having his post fully funded by the ESRC for the first year.

vii) *Deans*

It was reported that Professor Ian Brown had been appointed with effect from 1 August 2007 to the deanship of Arts & Humanities and Professor Mark Craven to the deanship of Law & Social Sciences.

viii) *The future of the University of London*

It was reported that Academic Board had agreed in principle to seek degree awarding powers next session.

29 Governing Body Membership Committee

A report was received from the Deputy Chair on the meeting of Governing Body Membership Committee held immediately prior to Governing Body. There remain six vacancies on 1 August 2007, but good progress was being made to identify suitable candidates. A further report will be made at the next meeting.

30 Governance at SOAS

Consideration was given to a report and recommendations from the Registrar [Appendix B].

It was noted that the Vision and Strategy had been agreed during the last committee round and that this had been incorporated into a draft publication which was tabled for governors' comments at the meeting. It was proposed that there should be eight major sub-strategies to underpin the Vision and Strategy for the School as a whole. These are:

- Academic Strategy
- Research Strategy
- Student Experience Strategy
- Financial Strategy
- HR Strategy
- External Relations Strategy
- Estates and Infrastructure Strategy
- Information and Internal Communications Strategy

Noting the ambitious time table, it was reported that there was an urgent need to ensure that timely and adequate management information was available to monitor and inform progress so that the time table could be met. It was recommended that the committee structure be mapped on to the supporting sub-strategies and that the new structure should be introduced next session on the basis that a further review could be held after one year.

The report and recommendations were **endorsed**.

31 Governing Body

It was reported that a further round of consultations was taking place concerning the effectiveness of Governing Body and a full report would be made at the next meeting. It was noted that any major changes to Governing Body could require recourse to the Privy Council as there may need to be changes to the School's Charter.

32 Finance

- (i) Consideration was given to the draft Financial Strategy to 2011 [Appendix C].

The strategy aims to support the School's Corporate Plan by setting financial targets so that sufficient resources are generated and made available to achieve academic objectives.

The School has made deficits on continuing activities for nine of the last ten years. The School's financial position has been underpinned by exceptional gains on the disposal of two halls of residence. In addition, over the last few years, it had only been possible to underpin the School's financial position by making soft but costly cuts to library acquisitions and estate maintenance. With the School's cash position now being far from healthy, without any change to the School's financial performance the situation will rapidly deteriorate.

To address these underlying problems, the financial strategy seeks to identify:

- where we are currently financially
- how we compare with other institutions
- where we would want to be in 2011
- how we might best get there

Recent HEFCE guidelines set institutions with the target of achieving 4% surpluses after depreciation. This is an increase on previous guidance and reflects the need for greater investment in the future of Higher Education and increased concern about financial volatility in the sector. At present, given the current staffing complement, the School, relative to obvious comparators, has a low level of income from research and consultancy and lower staff/student ratios. Whilst it

was recognised that the majority of staff already felt overstretched by current activity, it was important that staff energies were directed towards activities which would produce the income streams to ensure the School's financial health. This would require the monitoring of performance at faculty, departmental and individual levels. The strategy proposed that this be achieved by increased financial devolution, the introduction of financial incentives, better administrative support and good management information. It was also recognised that in devolving financial authority to faculties, the current resource allocation model would require updating or replacing. It would also be necessary to identify key performance indicators and other performance indicators at all levels of the School.

The Financial Strategy was **approved**. It was noted that it was intended that the Director of Finance would provide briefings to staff, initially at faculty and departmental levels.

- (ii) A report was received on the Forecast compared to Budget 2006/7 [Appendix D]. The overall financial position has improved since the last report with a net reduction of £157,000 in the projected deficit. This is primarily caused by a favourable settlement with regard to the historic intercollegiate teaching fees.

33 Estates matters

Consideration was given to a report and recommendations on a number of estates projects [Appendix F].

Arising from the report:

- i) *Tottenham Hale Student Residences*

It was noted that Resources Committee had authorised, subject to contract, the Clerk to Governing Body to continue discussions on behalf of SOAS and the Bloomsbury Colleges with a view to securing a Nominations Agreement for the proposed Unite student residence in Tottenham Hale. If successful, some 275 places for post-graduates will be available to the School in 2009. In the interim, Unite were proposing to provide some student accommodation in existing residences to the Bloomsbury Colleges.

- ii) *Vernon Square Residences*

It was hoped that planning permission could be secured for the Vernon Square residences at the April meeting of the London Borough of Islington Planning Committee. This should enable work to commence on site in July 2007 for completion in December 2008. If achieved, this would provide an additional 103 residential places from 1 January 2009 and it was agreed that the risk of not filling these places at that

time was minimal. The Construction Contract would be let under existing authorities.

The Registrar had held a meeting with our property advisors, R & M Projects Ltd, and they were preparing an options report on the proposed disposal. Estates Committee strongly recommended that we consider a pre-sale of the student residences as soon as we have a planning permission. This proposal was **endorsed** and authority was given to the Chair and the Treasurer to authorise the terms of the sale, should an early decision be required before the next meeting of Finance & General Purposes Committee.

iii) *21-22 Russell Square*

It was reported that the purchase of the premises had been completed and that Jonap, the appointed contractors, had taken possession of the building. Subject to London Borough of Camden Building Control and English Heritage agreement, work would soon commence with a view to enabling the building to be occupied in September 2007.

iv) *SOAS Master Plan*

It was reported that good progress was being made by John McAslan & Partners, the appointed Master Planners who are updating their original 1999 report. An extensive schedule of consultation meetings was taking place during March before detailed proposals were brought forward.

The report was **endorsed**.

34 Equality Committee

Consideration was given to a report from the Equality Committee relating to 2005-6 [Appendix G]. It was noted with regret that no one from the Committee had been able to be present at the meeting. The Director & Principal drew everyone's attention to the need for better management information. However, he believed that improved data would highlight the need for the School to address some equality issues.

35 Academic Board

The draft minutes of the meeting of Academic Board held on 7 March 2007 were received [Appendix H].

36 Finance and General Purposes Committee

The draft minutes of the meeting of Finance and General Purposes Committee held on 13 March 2007 were received [Appendix I].

37 Other business

The Chair invited the Students' Union representatives to initiate some fundraising activities on behalf of the School. She also invited Governing Body members to make a contribution to the School, however modest.

38 Date of next meeting

The next meeting of Governing Body would be held on Friday 15 June 2007 starting at 11.00am followed by lunch.