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SCHOOL OF ORIENTAL AND AFRICAN STUDIES

GOVERNING BODY

Friday 20 March 2009

MINUTES

Lady Barbara Thomas Judge (Chair)
Professor M A Knibb (Vice-Chair)
Mr M French (Honorary Treasurer)
Professor P Webley (Director & Principal)
Mr A Bhanji
Sir David Brewer*
Professor I Brown
Professor Sir Ivor Crewe
Dr B Fortna
Sir Graham Fry
Professor G Furniss
Mr J Griffith-Jones*
Dr R Harrison
Professor B Harriss-White
Mr J Hughes-Hallett
Professor M Hutt

Mr K Kutay
Professor D Latchman*
Mr P Lea-Wilson
Mr A Parker*
Professor N Rao
Professor A Saad Filho
Mr B Sellers
Professor S Subedi
Mr N Uddin
Ms Z Weaver*
Dr H West*
Ms E Wright

In attendance: Mr G Appleby (Director of Finance)
Professor M Craven
(Dean of Faculty of Law & Social Sciences)
Ms S Page (Registrar & Secretary)
Mr A Smith
Ms J Halliday (Deputy Secretary)
[minute secretary]

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

22 Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 10 December 2008 were **approved** and signed.

23 Matters arising

There were no matters arising not covered elsewhere on the agenda.

24 Director & Principal's Report

Governing Body received a report from the Director and Principal [Appendix A] and the following additional comments were noted:

- (i) *HEFCE: review of special funding*
Governing Body welcomed the news that HEFCE had moved a significant proportion of the special funding for the School into the

School's mainstream grant. It was noted that special funding for the Library was for two years and not therefore secured on a long-term basis.

(ii) *HEFCE: funding decisions*

It was noted that the HEFCE move to safeguard research funding for science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) subjects impacted unfavourably on SOAS. The impact of this and other factors with regard to the RAE results meant that SOAS would suffer a reduction in overall recurrent funding of 0.7%, compared to an average sector increase of 4.1%.

(iii) *Admissions 2009-10*

Governing Body was pleased to note that offers for total research student applications and overseas research student applications were up considerably, compared to this time last year. Taught postgraduate applications were favourable.

(iv) *The PDF*

The protection nominees were concerned that the Charity Commission had declined to comment on the proposed arrangements for 53 Gordon Square. The School awaited a response from the protection nominees.

25 2008 Research Assessment Exercise

Governing Body received a report from the Pro-Director (Research & Enterprise) on the results of the RAE 2008 and the way forward [Appendix B]. Despite some excellent results in some areas, some material submitted had been judged by RAE panels to be of 1* quality only (and even some unclassified). This was worrying both in terms of the judgement and of the fact that prior internal monitoring had not identified this. It was noted that SOAS had submitted a high percentage of staff (92%), whereas other universities had been more selective. The Pro-Director reported that he was analysing with colleagues how some of the less favourable results had come about so that strategies could be put in place – as set out in the report - to increase the quality of research in time for the next national exercise (the REF). The Research and Enterprise Sub-Strategy was being revised next term.

Governors noted with concern that some generic issues were evident from a closer look at the RAE panels' textual commentaries, notably insufficient evidence of a strategic approach at Unit of Assessment level to the development of research at SOAS. Governing Body also enquired what action was being taken in respect of a strategy towards the 21 academic staff who had not been entered as research-active. Governing Body needed to be assured that the School would be addressing all these issues and that progress was being made and monitored. It was noted that the Deans and the Pro-Director would be reporting back to Executive Board on progress in respect of the 21 staff by September 2009.

Governing Body asked that a report on action being taken on all these matters come to each of its meetings from now on until further notice.

26 Finance

(i) *Forecast financial out-turn for 2008/9*

Governing Body received a paper from the Resources and Planning Committee on the financial forecast out-turn for 2008/9, noting that the out-turn was better than earlier expected [Appendix C]. The out-turn was now forecast to be a modest surplus of £215,000, due largely to the strong performance of distance learning provision. Governing Body was pleased to note that, if the forecast turns out to be accurate, there will have been surpluses for three years running.

(ii) *Cash flow projection*

Governing Body received the cash flow projection [Appendix D].

(iii) *Capital and debt statement*

Governing Body received the capital and debt statement [Appendix E].

(iv) *Short-term deposits*

Governing Body received a paper on short-term deposits [Appendix F].

(v) *Budget scoping for 2009/10*

Governing Body received a paper from the Resources and Planning Committee on the budget scoping exercise 2009/10, informed by the HEFCE grant letter [Appendix G]. It was noted that the projected deficit had stood at £1.5M but that the Committee had considered this an unsustainable target. Governing Body **approved** the Committee's recommendation to set a target deficit of £750,000, noting that the savings proposed in IFCELS had already been provisionally taken into account. It was noted that the School's longer term financial strategy was being examined and would be brought back to Governing Body in due course.

(vi) *TRAC return*

Governing Body **approved** the 2007/8 TRAC return [Appendix H].

27 Risk Register

Governing Body received the updated Risk Register [Appendix I]. It was noted that the School's internal auditors, Kingston City Group, had developed the process, involving the School's Executive Board in annual risk workshops. It was noted that the review of the effectiveness of the School's risk management was in the terms of reference of Audit Committee but that Governing Body itself should have more involvement. It was noted that more detailed, lower level risks and targets were set out in the action plans of the School's eight core sub-strategies. The latter were monitored by their respective sub-committees, reporting up to Governing Body through Academic Board or Resources and Planning Committee as appropriate. Governing Body **approved** the updated Risk Register, and asked to receive regular updates on actions required.

28 Key Performance Indicators

Governing Body received a report on key performance indicators (KPIs), noting that this was the first report of them to Governing Body [Appendix J]. These ten high level KPIs had been derived from a consideration of the School's *Vision and Strategy* at the top end and the eight sub-strategies supporting it. It was **agreed** that the KPIs should include targets in all cases

and that the benchmarks could be the targets if appropriate. It would be helpful in due course to show more than three years of data. Governors also asked for the paper to be laid out in a more accessible form. It was agreed that the KPIs needed to be credible and realistic. For example, the aim in the *Vision* that SOAS will be one of the top 20 universities in the world by 2016 (KPI 1) might need revisiting and substituting with the aim of being the top university of its type. It was **agreed** that there should be a mechanism to enable Governing Body to keep the specifics of each KPI (such as student recruitment) under review on a rolling basis. It was noted that there was an annual review of the eight sub-strategies and their lower level targets (PIs) in the summer term, which would be taken forward into a review of the KPIs. Governing Body **agreed** that the KPIs were crucial to enable it to evaluate the School's performance and should be reported on an annual basis from now on.

Governing Body **approved** the KPIs.

29 Governing Body Effectiveness Review

Governing Body received a paper from its Steering Group established in June 2008 to review the effectiveness of Governing Body and related governance matters [Appendix K]. It was noted that Governing Body had received an initial report at its last meeting. This second report set out options and recommendations for Governing Body's consideration. Governing Body's view was specifically sought on its composition and size. The Steering Group had set out two options: one with a total of 25 members, and the second with a total of 20. A third option of 21 members was proposed. Governing Body noted that HEFCE advice steered institutions towards significantly smaller governing bodies than had previously prevailed. In discussion, governors expressed the need to balance a concern for democratic self-governance with the need to ensure there was independent scrutiny through a body small enough to operate efficiently and effectively.

After debate, Governing Body voted on the three options as follows:

- Option One (25 members): 6 votes in favour;
- Option Two (20 members): 0 votes in favour;
- Option Three (21 members): 16 votes in favour.

Option Three was therefore **approved**, comprising the following composition:

- Chair (independent member)
- Director and Principal
- 12 independent members
- 5 Academic Board members (to comprise the Pro-Director and the Vice Principal *ex officio*, plus 2 academic and 1 professional services staff member)
- 2 students

It was noted that if the nominees did not comprise the three Deans, they would be in attendance as appropriate to business in a similar manner to the Registrar and Secretary and the Director of Finance.

Governing Body **approved** the proposals in the paper, including Option Three above, and looked forward to a final report, including an implementation plan, at its meeting in June 2009.

It was also noted that a report on the Committee Review (chaired by the Vice Principal), including a review of Academic Board and how it related to Governing Body, would be presented to Governing Body in June 2009.

30 Degree Awarding Powers (DAPs)

Governing Body received the School's application submitted in February 2009 to the Privy Council, DIUS and the QAA for degree awarding powers [Appendix L]. In introducing the paper, the Vice Principal described the work of the working group which had prepared the document and which would continue its work to ensure all was in place prior to the inspection visits. The Chair thanked the Vice Principal on Governing Body's behalf for the amount of work in preparing the document and taking this forward. It was noted that a response was expected from the QAA the following month.

31 IFCELS

Governing Body received a 'white paper' and UCU's alternative 'green paper' on proposals for IFCELS, following a review of its provision and widespread consultation within the School on the proposals [Appendix M]. After discussion, and noting the recommendations of Resources and Planning Committee and Academic Board, Governing Body **endorsed** Option D as the best way forward, noting that there was a further period of formal consultation with IFCELS staff and campus unions.

32 Estates Matters

Governing Body received a report on estates developments [Appendix N].

Governing Body received a report on the progress towards acquisition of 20 Russell Square and 53 Gordon Square and **delegated authority** for the final approval of both transactions and authorisation of signatories to a sub-committee of Governing Body as indicated in the paper [Appendix O].

33 Health & Safety

Governing Body received a report from the Registrar and Secretary on health and safety at SOAS [Appendix P] and a report from the Health and Safety Committee [Appendix Q]. Governing Body **approved** the health and safety policy and guidance [Appendix R], and received guidance for governors regarding their health and safety responsibilities [Appendix S]. These matters would from now on be included in the induction materials for governors and the guidelines would be monitored in future on a regular basis.

34 Academic Board

Governing Body received the draft minutes of the meeting of Academic Board held on 4 March 2009 [Appendix T].

35 Resources and Planning Committee

Governing Body received the draft minutes of the meeting of Resources and Planning Committee held on 3 March 2009 [Appendix U].

36 Date of next meeting

The next meeting of Governing Body would be held on Friday 12 June 2009, starting at 11.00am followed by lunch.