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**SCHOOL OF ORIENTAL AND AFRICAN STUDIES**

**EQUALITY COMMITTEE**

**21 November 2006**

**MINUTES**

**Members:** Professor Elisabeth Croll (Chair)  
Mrs Jan Airey  
Dr Fareda Banda (UCU representative)  
Ms Kristen Birchill (SU representative)  
Ms Maxine Brown\*  
Marcus Cerny  
Dr Jeevan Deol  
Ms Lauren Evans (SU representative)  
Ms Jacqui Freeman (Unison representative)  
Professor Werner F Menski  
Dr Timon Screech\*

**In attendance:** Ms Deb Viney (Executive Secretary)  
Ms Zoë Davis  
Ms Jo Halliday (Chaired part of the meeting)  
Mr Terry Harvey  
Mrs Domini Mitchell  
Mr Peter Mitchell  
Ms Jenneh Kebbie (Minute Secretary)

*\* Those whose names are marked with an asterisk were unable to attend the meeting*

**1 Membership and terms of reference**

The Chair welcomed new members Ms Lauren Evans and Ms Kristen Birchill Students' Union representatives, and Mr Marcus Cerny, the non-academic staff representative. Apologies were received from Dr Timon Screech who was unable to attend. It was noted that, due to Dr Screech's teaching commitments, he was not able to attend this session's meetings and therefore a replacement for him for this year was being considered.

The Committee noted the membership and terms of reference [Appendix A]. It was **AGREED** that the committee would note the procedure for the conduct of meetings paper at the next meeting.

**2 Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting held on 30 May 2006 were **APPROVED**.

**3 Matters arising**

Members received an update paper on matters arising [Appendix B] and further commented as follows:

(ii) *Harassment Policies*

The Committee was informed that the School was waiting for the Unions to agree on the final drafting which was still being revised. After agreement with UNISON and UCU and the SU the policies would come back to EC and then to Executive Board and Governing Body.

(iii) *Race Equality Policy Action Plan*

It was **AGREED** that the revision of the Policy and action plan would be deferred until spring 2007

#### 4 **Review of previous year's work**

The Diversity Advisor gave a brief report on her work, in 2006-06 and highlighted the following:

- (i) **Disability Equality Week** – took place week beginning 9 October 2006 and as discussed later on agenda.
- (ii) **Student Voices event** –The Diversity Advisor had completed a survey which addressed issues that concerned students with disabilities and the main purpose of the event was to identify issues for disabled students within higher education institutions and to provide input from students for the Bloomsbury Disability Equality Schemes;
- (iii) **Disability Equality Scheme (DES)** – item to be discussed later on the agenda;
- (iv) **Annual Report to the Governing Body** - It was **AGREED** that the Annual Report to the Governing Body would be circulated to members prior to it going to Governing Body for consideration on 15 December 2006. The report would include reports from the survey and stats gathered.

#### 5 **Academic Promotion**

The Committee considered statistics on Academic Promotion by gender and ethnicity [Appendix C]. Members were concerned that the figures showed that there was an insufficient number of women applying for readership and professor positions and that it would be important to investigate this trend.

Members suggested that it would be important to study the intersection of the figures in 2004/05 of those applying from Senior Lecturer to Reader and that closer investigation on this issue needed to be conducted. It was pointed out that the Reader to professorship figures were ambiguous because very few women were readers. The following recommendations were made:

- (a) Report should show numbers of males and females in each staff group
- (b) Investigate whether there were any reasons preventing women, and ethnic minority groups from applying for promotion
- (c) Rates of success for women and ethnic minorities groups
- (d) Investigate what and whether there are sufficient channels for applications from women and ethnic minorities

The UNISON member stated that it was also evident by the figures that a disproportionate number of staff members of white origin had been successful in their promotions compared with other ethnic groups. The HR Director said that HR would be now be administering and monitoring the Academic Promotions procedure which would allow closer monitoring of the data. He said that reports would be produced on an annual basis and that the results would be relayed to the appropriate committees for further consideration. The process would enable the School to look at existing staff and then be able to identify any difficulties, which would in turn equip the School to make decisions to go forward in particular areas which were underrepresented.

The UNISON member requested that because it was women lecturers who had been underrepresented, they should be invited to comment further on this issue. The UCU member asked

for a narrative with regards to these trends. She also stated that the Promotions Committee should have been aware of the figures and that there was dissatisfaction with various procedures of the Promotions Committee itself.

Members also requested greater clarification with regards to the interpretation of the figures presented. It was **AGREED** that a more qualitative narrative would be provided by HR and that a column of figures would be provided which identified more clearly the differing categories. The UCU member recommended that the figures should be prepared into more specific ethnic groups as only four or five categories were represented therefore the figures could be statistically insignificant. The HR Director said that this could present a problem with staff members being easily identified. The Committee **AGREED** that the numbers needed to be comparative in order to understand the table fully.

The Chair asked the Committee for their views on what the next step forward would be in relation to where the report should go. The HR Director said that an annual report would be presented to Committee in the future which would be passed onto the appropriate committee with recommendations and requested that this be carried out in the next session because of time limitations. It was generally felt that the Committee should look at the data and that it was important that recommendations were made to the School for action.

It was **AGREED** that the figures would be presented at the first Promotion Committee in 2007, with an expression of concern. It was also **AGREED** that the figures would be amended with regard to how many members of staff held and had applied for particular posts.

## 6 HR Staff Diversity Report

The Committee considered the Equality and Diversity Staff Report 2005-2006 [Appendix E], from the HR Department. The HR Director pointed out that although the School had been collecting data on staff and had been reporting on this to HESA (Higher Education Statistics Agency), the data had not been routinely analysed and reported locally before, and therefore this was the first report of its kind to be produced at the School. As a result the report this year would contain very little comparative data which members would have to take into consideration. He further added that there were currently large numbers of staff employed on fixed-term, hourly-paid or casual contracts where obtaining the required statistics had proved very difficult. This issue would be addressed in the process of converting those temporary contracts into permanent fractional contracts, so next year's data will be more complete.

The HR Director asked the Committee for comments on the report and the following recommendations were made:

- (i) **Key Data** – (page 2), members felt that the presentation of the statistics was difficult to read and therefore it was **AGREED** that the data in this section would be revised, e.g. to show the percentage of staff in each category.
- (ii) **Ethnicity** – (page 6), the UCU member said that there appeared to be no instances of ethnic minority members of staff holding top administrative grade positions within the School. However, there were more representatives of ethnic minority staff in clerical grades 4-6 than in Clerical grades 2 and 3. The report also stated that there was greater representation of ethnic minority staff in Academic Related grades 2 and 3 than in grades 4 and 5, whilst there were no ethnic minority staff at the Academic Related 6 grade. The HR Director said that 7.5% of staff chose not to disclose this data.
- (iii) **Grade** – (page 8), the HR Director reported that this area had not been analysed fully this year and that the School would shortly be undertaking an institution-wide job evaluation, following which there would be a requirement to undertake an equal pay audit. The UCU and UNISON members queried why the figures relating to grades were not available and asked the HR Director whether it would be possible to produce the figures on this as they would like them available prior to the forthcoming institutional job evaluation. The HR Director said that it may be feasible but added that it could be difficult as the figures changed on a daily basis. It was **AGREED** that the figures would be produced at the next meeting.

- (iv) **Recruitment by Ethnicity** – (page 8, 9), the figures showed that the proportion of white applicants increased at each stage of the recruitment process, (53% white applicants, 62% white interviews, and 74% appointments). The UCU members suggested that it would also be important and helpful to receive data on the gender, ethnicity, and intersection i.e. how many BME women applied, together with figures on those with disabilities. Members felt that it was important that cross correlating of data was undertaken in looking at the recruitment process itself. It was **AGREED** that at the next meeting the HR Department would present a report on recruitment by gender and by disability

The HR Director said that in order to address the issues above that they were committed to carrying out the following:

- a) Monitoring data on ethnicity, gender, age, disability. This would be likely to extend to include religious belief, sexual orientation and staff turnover in future years. Data on recruitment would also be monitored.
- b) Policy: the School has published its Race Equality Policy and Action Plan and will also be publishing its Disability Equality Scheme by December 2006.
- c) Equality Impact Assessment: The forthcoming year will see the start of work on the Equality Impact Assessment being initiated whereby all agreed policies, practices and functions at the School will be audited to identify their relevance to discrimination.

The UCU member was concerned with regards to the proposed mandatory equality and diversity training for staff involved in recruitment and selection. She stated that this had been discussed and agreed in previous Equality Committee meetings but had not been actioned. The UNISON member said that it was evident by the figures presented that a disproportionate number of applications of white origin had been successful in their job applications compared with other ethnic groups and recommended that all those involved on the interview panels should attend mandatory equality and diversity training. The Student Disability Advisor asked whether the recruitment factors were in favour of one particular group. The UCU member replied that this may be the case as, in her experience, SOAS requires ethnic minority job applicants to have gained a PhD whilst white applicants were only required to declare that they were either in the process of writing one or were intending to write one. Additionally she felt that perception of SOAS as an employer in the local community was low as there had been few successful job applications for ethnic minorities.

The Chair informed members that the chairs of Recruitment Committees had received equality and diversity training. However, members had yet to do so. Some members suggested that Equality and Diversity training should be compulsory for all staff. However, it was also pointed out that this may prove quite difficult to put into practice.

Members felt that SOAS had a duty to fulfil its commitment to equal opportunities. As the UCU member pointed out, certain departments within the School seemed to bypass the formal recruitment procedure when appointing for certain temporary and part-time positions and therefore applicants were not subjected to the same paper selection process as the rest. The HR Director said that he was now aware of certain issues regarding the recruitment process for some posts and welcomed the recommendations brought forward.

He informed members that he would take these recommendations to the appropriate committees and report back to Equality Committee on their progression. It was **AGREED** that the recommendations would go to Executive Board with the assistance of HR and other appropriate committees i.e. Staffing Committee, and that the outcome of these discussions may influence HR policies on the matter. The report would then go on to Governing Body.

The Committee suggested the following:

- i Targeting of ethnic minorities through relevant advertising which would be determined by the post available.
- ii The Diversity Advisor and HR Manager could give further support
- iii Promotional Audit should be carried out
- iv Staff survey which should include qualitative data from which HR would produce a paper to GB

The Chair thanked HR for the work done.

## **7 Disability Equality Scheme (DES)**

The Committee considered the first draft action plans for the DES from the Diversity Advisor [Appendices F, G, H, I, J, K, L]. She informed members that the actions plans had been developed with the involvement of disabled staff and disabled students in the Students Voices event who were recruited from SOAS itself and two other members of the Bloomsbury Colleges, i.e. the Institute of Education and Birkbeck College. The School was obliged by law to have the DES and Action Plans available by 4 December 2006. She reported that the first drafts had now been amended after consultation with heads of departments and that the second drafts would go to Executive Board and that they would also be circulated to Equality Committee. It was pointed out that the SU section of the DES had been omitted as the SU are not officially part of the School's structure and therefore cannot be included within the action plan.

It was reported that a revised Students Voices document would be made available on the equality and diversity website which will reflect the issues more accurately. The Student Disability Advisor said that staff with disabilities did not have an incentive to declare their disability and therefore were not aware of the advantages that might be available to them by doing so. The Diversity Advisor said that it was important that the forthcoming Staff Diversity Survey explicitly categorised varying disabilities and that it would also be valuable to stress the benefits of declaring a disability. The HR Director further commented that they were in the process of changing the way job applications were set out and that clarifying the benefits and possible resources would be important. It was pointed out that some staff members may be concerned that by disclosing they would be officially registered as having a disability, which is not correct. The HR Department would be aiming for the 'two ticks' standard.

The HR Director stated that this would mean that it would become policy to offer an interview during the short listing procedure where it was felt that an applicant with disabilities had met the minimum requirement. Also further support whilst in post would also be offered.

It was **AGREED** that the DES would go to EB on 27 November 2006 and then onto GB on 15 December 2006. It was also **AGREED** that the DES would be publicised and actioned by the Disability Liaison Group.

## **8 Equal Opportunities Questionnaire Autumn 2005**

The Committee considered the analysis from the Equal Opportunities Questionnaire 2005 [Appendix M]. It was **AGREED** that whilst some points from the survey were noted by the Committee, members felt that extreme care should be exercised when taking the figures into account. Members also expressed concern that this survey was now the second activity survey within a year that had been conducted with regards to equality which had been unsatisfactory, with no clear, substantial data that could be used by the School on which to go forward.

## **9 Faith facilities**

The Diversity Advisor reported that she had proposed a report on this issue and that she would be meeting with the Director and Principal and representatives of faith groups in the coming weeks. She added that it had proved quite problematic in identifying additional space which was not allocated to the teaching timetable. The Committee agreed that it was important issue for the School to try and meet the needs of those requesting prayer spaces. The report would be available to members on requested to the Diversity Advisor.

## **10 Childcare Provision - Staff**

The Committee received the Childcare Survey 2006 results [Appendix N] and the proposed Childcare Policy 2006 – 2007 [Appendix O], from the HR department. The HR Manager reported that 87% of the respondents felt that the current childcare provision offered by the School was inadequate. 66% of staff would like the opportunity to purchase childcare vouchers and 92% of the respondents found that holiday or half-term periods were the most difficult where childcare was concerned. She also reported that the majority of respondents preferred nursery type provision. However, the School did not have the resources to provide this facility.

Members considered the Childcare Policy 2006-2007 and requested clarification on the breakdown of all the options available to staff of different categories i.e. clerical/administrative and academics. The HR Manager said that the applicants for the grant scheme must have passed their probationary period and be the parent or legal guardian of the child (up to the age of 5). If both parents work at SOAS, only one would be able to receive the payment. Some members were concerned that this represented an inequality as some members of staff were on probation for longer periods than others and therefore felt that certain parameters needed to be established. They also felt that the age limit of 5 years was a disadvantage to lower tax bracket members of staff, since the higher tax bracket scheme runs up to age 16.

The applicant for the Childcare Voucher scheme must be the parent or legal guardian of the child (up to the age of 15 if able-bodied or 16 if disabled). Applicants would be obliged to commit to the scheme for a minimum of twelve months, as required by the Inland Revenue, unless there was a material change in personal circumstances. The scheme would be available to all, though may favour those who fall in the higher rate tax bracket.

Members felt that it was important to make explicit in the policy that the voucher scheme together with the ACCOR scheme would be available for those in the lower rate tax bracket together with the current £25 per week. However, this would not be available to the members of staff who fall within the higher tax bracket (40% and over). This goes some way to addressing the inequality.

The HR Director said that if the age limit in both schemes went up to the age of 15 more significant funds would be required from the School and this could prove difficult to secure. The HR Director said that at present a maximum of 50 members of staff could access the current funds of £14,000 per annum.

It was **AGREED** that HR would put forward a paper to the Resources Committee, asking them to consider increasing the Childcare budget.

## 11 **Childcare - Students**

The SU tabled a paper which highlighted the lack of student childcare provision which they felt had not been adequately addressed by the School since it was first campaigned for in 1977. They proposed a student survey in order to establish whether there would be sufficient demand for student child care provision amongst the student body and it was **AGREED** that the SU would collaborate with the Diversity Advisor who could also provide advice on how to proceed with this issue. It was **AGREED** that the Diversity Advisor would explore external facilities options together with the cost implications and consult with the Bloomsbury Colleges on this matter and report back to the Committee at the next meeting. The issue of inadequate student childcare facilities also raised the question as to how many students did not apply to SOAS because of the lack of childcare facilities. The SU suggested that although the student and staff childcare facilities were two separate issues both parties could benefit from possible joint discussions on the subject in the future.

## 11 **Disability Equality Week**

The Diversity Advisor reported that the launch event had been well received. The main benefit gained from the week was that it had raised the issue of disability in people's minds and highlighted the profile of people with disabilities. The Diversity Advisor and Student Disability Advisor said that lessons had been learned from this first event and recommended that the event should be staged later in the first term as it was felt that the time of this year's event clashed with other events. It would also allow time for more publicity to promote the event in the future.

**12 Disability Liaison Group**

It was **AGREED** that two additional members would be added to the working group and that preference would be given to members of staff with disabilities, one from non-academic and one academic. It was also proposed that a staff email would be sent out inviting applications. The Diversity Advisor requested that the DLG have set meetings throughout the academic year and might be included in the School's calendar three to four weeks prior to the meetings of Equality Committee.

**13 Any other business**

The UCU member requested that HR provide to the Committee data on salary bands for clerical, academic and academic related on staff (a) gender and (b) race.

**14 Date of next meeting**

The date of the next meeting will be on Tuesday 27 February 2007, at 10am in room 116, Russell Square.