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SCHOOL OF ORIENTAL AND AFRICAN STUDIES

EQUALITY COMMITTEE

Tuesday 30 May 2006

MINUTES

Members: Professor Elisabeth Croll (Chair)
Mrs Jan Airey
Dr Fareda Banda (AUT representative)
Ms Maxine Brown*
Mr Guy Croft (Students' Union Representative) [alternative]
Dr Jeevan Deol
Ms Jacqui Freeman (Unison representative)
Professor Werner F Menski
Dr Timon Screech*
Mrs Jean Tullett

In attendance: Ms Deb Viney (Executive Secretary)
Ms Zoë Davis*
Ms Jo Halliday
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*

24 Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 28 February 2006 were **APPROVED**.

25 Matters arising

(i) First Equality Committee meeting next academic session

It was noted that the date of the first meeting of the Committee had yet to be finalised, but it was likely that a date after reading week in early November would be confirmed shortly.

(ii) Equality and Diversity training

The Diversity Advisor gave an update on equality and diversity training and informed members that the main focus would be on the following areas: (a) new staff induction schedules, and (b) training and dealing with harassment and bullying.

(iii) Statistics on students and staff

The Committee received statistics on staff and student diversity [Appendix A]. It was agreed that the figures would not be discussed at length at the present meeting but would be considered at the Committee's first meeting of the next academic year in November 2006. Members felt that the margin of error (1.6%) was too great to allow comparisons of the various ethnic minorities.

The Committee asked whether the figures could be presented in a way that was more applicable to SOAS. The Diversity Advisor said the current reports from HESA could not be altered in terms of how they were presented by the School to HESA. However, it would be possible for the data from

the reports to be broken down to accommodate the School's internal equality and diversity monitoring requirements. Members said that it was important that the statistics were generated in a way that could be more beneficial to the Committee in terms of its own monitoring of statistical data. This would allow the School to make better use of the data when compiling its own figures.

The total number apparently included in the HESA return was 750, though this excluded clerical and administrative staff. The Committee requested a breakdown by gender of Heads of Departments. It was **AGREED** that more substantive data including clerical / administrative staff as well as academic staff would be presented at the next meeting.

The AUT member commented that as SOAS is a specialist institution it should have a more ethnically diverse staff than the national population or other universities.

26 Diversity update report

- (i) The Committee received an update from the Diversity Advisor who reported that the draft Internal Code of Practice on Equal Opportunities for the RAE 2008 had been sent to all members of staff by email.
- (ii) The Bloomsbury Consortium's Equality and Diversity Working Group had met and identified areas in which future collaboration could occur. Members have already begun sharing documents and templates.
- (iii) The Committee received a paper [Appendix B], from the Diversity Advisor containing proposals to put in place harassment contacts, as considered previously by the former Diversity Advisor although not implemented. The proposal was one response to the initial review of the data gathered from the Staff Equality Survey 2005, in which 26 staff – 9.58% of respondents – said they had sought advice about coping with bullying and a further 19 staff – 7.20% of respondents – said they had had some experience of bullying but had not sought advice.

The Committee heard that Executive Board had expressed its support in spring 2006 for the proposal to establish a team of harassment contacts. The UNISON representative expressed concerns with regard to the timescale of the proposal as the School's Harassment Policy, currently under review, had not been formally ratified. Therefore it would be inappropriate to train contacts prior to the Harassment Policy being officially agreed by all those concerned in the process. The Diversity Advisor said that it would be possible to defer the training of potential post holders until the Harassment Policy had been formally agreed. The Chair asked what the criteria were, with regard to the selection process. The Diversity Advisor replied by saying that all members of staff would be invited to apply for the posts and selection would take place during and after the training sessions.

Members queried why there was the inclusion of a 'Job Specification' as members thought that it was not necessary insofar as the post was a voluntary position. Members sought clarification as to what role the post holder would have in a potential harassment case, as the harassment contact would have had access to confidential information. The HR Manager said that the inclusion of a 'Job Specification' was to protect any individual who accepted the post and that it would only be used as a parameter to define the role. The Diversity Advisor replied that the role was provision of information about the process and emotional support. The Committee suggested that the title 'Job Description' be amended to read 'Role Description'. It was **AGREED** that the HR Department and the Diversity Advisor would further define the role of the harassment contact and further clarify the harassment contact's position should a potential harassment case evolve into a formal complaint.

The Committee supported the proposal, subject to the approval of the harassment policies. It was **AGREED** that the Diversity Advisor would revise the proposal taking into consideration the Committee's recommendations which would be made before the paper was circulated to the Committee for final approval. The Committee **AGREED** that the Students' Union incoming Sabbatical Officers should be involved in the harassment contact training.

- (iv) It was noted that the Student Voices event [Appendix C] was scheduled to take place on June 14 2006. 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 SOAS Disability Equality Scheme. The Chair welcomed the initiative and conveyed the support of the Committee for this event.
- (v) The Committee received a template for the Disability Equality Scheme (DES) from the Diversity Advisor [Appendix D], who is working in conjunction with the Student Disability Advisor and the Sian Jones, General Services Manager and also welcomed further contributions and ideas from members. It was planned that the final draft would come back to Equality Committee, then to Executive Board and to Governing Body in the first term of the new academic session for approval.
- (vi) The Committee was informed that the Diversity Advisor, in collaboration with the Bloomsbury Consortium, would be organising a Disability and Equality Day in October 2006. Both the SU and TUs had agreed to contribute activities to the event and it was noted all other parts of the School would be invited to participate. The Chair suggested that it would be a good opportunity during this event to remind and update members of staff on the duties and role the Equality Committee had within the School.
- (vii) The Diversity Advisor asked that the discussion on the more detailed analysis of the 2005 Equality Questionnaire be deferred until the next meeting in November because the analysis (from an external provider) had only arrived very recently and time was needed to write the accompanying report. The Committee agreed.
- (viii) The Race Equality Action plan would be revised over the summer. Members were informed that the current Race Equality Policy must undergo revision as it had been in place for three years. It was **AGREED** that copies of the current Race Equality Policy would be circulated to all members in order for them to give feedback on the existing one, to determine the priorities of any additional ones and to suggest how the implementation of them should be progressed.
- (ix) The Diversity Advisor would be meeting with the new SU Sabbatical Officers to discuss equality and diversity training sessions for the SU Executive.
- (x) The Diversity Advisor informed the Committee that there is a possibility that the School's student-related lawyers could provide a training session concerned with academic freedom and freedom of speech issues.

27 Academic Promotions

The Diversity Advisor gave an update to the Committee concerning academic promotions. She was asked to investigate the issue of possible biases in academic promotions and to conduct research on staff experiences. A proposal to carry out this research (funded by the Rewarding and Developing Staff budget) was provided [Appendix E].

Members queried point 6 [Appendix E], that is, 'collection of information about the frequency of personal experiences and / or observations of other staff undertaking consensual sexual / romantic relationship(s) with students(s)' and asked for the wording to be amended as it would be difficult to determine when romantic relationships were occurring, and whether this infringed on personal freedom, and members were unclear what information was sought here and why.

At point 7 [Appendix E], 'collection of colleagues opinions on what our institutional priorities (action points) ought to be in each of the diversity areas', some members were concerned that previous survey findings had not been disclosed nor the results of those findings ever implemented or addressed. The UNISON representative sought clarification as to what the survey would be based on and said that members of staff had already completed previous surveys which involved revealing confidential and personal information about themselves. Because the initial results had not been communicated effectively to members of staff, many of them had become distrustful and cautious with the process which had resulted in many staff members being 'survey weary'. Staff felt that many of the problems they had been asked to comment on had not been addressed satisfactorily. She said that in order for staff members to feel positive in participating in future survey exercises, the results of those surveys needed to be published at the earliest opportunity

and in addition the findings and issues identified should be properly addressed. She requested that those conducting surveys in the future must ensure that the Committee and members of staff received more timely information on the responses resulting from them.

The Diversity Advisor said that the research proposed may be subsumed by a forthcoming staff survey conducted by HR. The HR Director said that survey could provide a valuable insight on various issues, like whether various equality and diversity policies had been implemented and the effect of this, if any, on the School. The HR Director said that the survey could be categorised into different sections and would cover equality and diversity, staff satisfaction, trades unions, health and safety issues as well as others areas and could also serve as a benchmark against other universities. He said that it was important to encourage and involve all members of staff as it would result in a high return rate and statistically valid results. He assured the Committee that he would ensure any survey was conducted correctly and that he would relay the results to staff at the earliest opportunity. After the survey had been completed an action plan would be put in place to implement any of the issues and priorities identified. It was **AGREED** that HR and the Diversity Advisor would consult each other with regard to any future staff survey.

28 Harassment Policy

The HR Director reported that the Staff Harassment Policy together with the other equality policies would be discussed at the forthcoming ACAS negotiation meetings in two weeks time. Areas of concern relating to the Harassment Policy for staff, were still present and although attempts to resolve them as quickly as possible were ongoing this could still prove problematic. It was noted that, although obviously the TUs did negotiate on behalf of their members, they did not represent other SOAS staff who would want policies to be progressed.

It was **AGREED** that the Diversity Advisor would formally consult the SU to discuss Harassment policies. It was **AGREED** that both the staff and student harassment policies would come back to Equality Committee in November 2006 and then go on to Governing Body in December 2006.

Members asked for clarity with regard to the ratification of policies. The Diversity Advisor said that the final responsibility for approving policies lay with the School's Governing Body, after consultation with the trades unions and the SU.

29 External Invitations Policy

The Committee was asked to consider a draft External Invitations Policy from the Diversity Advisor [Appendix G]. The matter was brought to the School's attention as a result of an incident which occurred in one of the School's Faculties in which an invitation was received from an external organisation inviting SOAS students on a trip to Saudi Arabia. A member of staff queried why only male students between certain ages were invited and it was recognised that there could be one or more equality issues attached to such invitations. The Diversity Advisor said that experts advised that if such invitations were circulated in future, the School could be liable under one or more of the various pieces of diversity legislation and could face a substantial fine or other outcome.

It was **AGREED** that the draft policy would be circulated to all staff for a period of consultation and that if a revised draft was necessary it would be returned to Equality Committee in the Autumn Term and then go to Executive Board before going through the ACAS/SOAS policies process and Governing Body for formal ratification.

30 Nursery Provision

The Committee was asked to consider a request from the UNISON representative to expand the School's current childcare allowance scheme to include after-school clubs and childminders for the over-5s. The UNISON member stated that the current financial support offered by the School had not been sufficiently publicised and that the amount available had not increased for several years. She pointed out that it was in the interest of the School to be recognised as an institution that understood the need for a positive work / life balance.

The HR Manager said that present funding for nursery provision was limited at £14,000 per annum which would not be sufficient to establish internal crèche facilities or to fund after-school care for over-5s. The Committee could request an increase in funding if a significant number of people

applied for childcare facilities. However, this would have to be within the constraints of the whole School's budget.

The HR Manager informed the Committee that the HR Department had been investigating alternative childcare schemes. One option could be the use of ACCOR services in which childcare vouchers are offered to employees as a voluntary benefit whereby they could convert part of their salary into vouchers, also known as the 'salary sacrifice scheme'. For those in the lower rate tax bracket, there would still be the current £25 which would come from the nursery provision budget. The current childcare provision of £25 would not, however, be available to those in the higher tax bracket as the childcare voucher scheme was more favourable to the latter overall. It was **AGREED** that the HR Department would consult with the AUT and UNISON representatives on an all-School email which would be sent out seeking views from members of staff and informing them of the available financial support for nursery provision though it was pointed out that at this stage the email should be an expression of interest and not a promise of delivery. It was **AGREED** that the figures and feedback received would be considered by the Committee at the next meeting.

The UNISON member requested that if ACCOR Services were to be used by the School a breakdown of all the options available to staff of different categories i.e. clerical/administrative and academic should be made available; this would allow members of staff to clearly define what options were accessible to them. It was **AGREED** that a breakdown of the options available would be presented at the next meeting.

HR Director reported that a revised draft policy on nursery provision was in progress and would be finalised by September 2006. The policy would aim to be more comprehensive in terms of the best ways in which to provide childcare facilities. The UNISON member asked for consultation with the Committee on the draft policy. The Committee **AGREED** that the draft paper would come back to the Committee at the next meeting prior to going to Staffing Committee for recommendation.

31 Rewarding and Developing Staff funding (RDS)

The Diversity Advisor reported that a provider had been identified for the implementation of a Disability database for the School's Disability Service and that this would be funded from the RDS.

32 Any other business

32.1 Equal Pay Audit

The Diversity Advisor reported that an Equal Pay audit would probably have to occur as a result of the new Gender Equality Duty due to be (implemented April 2007).

32.2 Thanks

The Chair expressed her thanks to all members of Equality Committee for their work during the year.

33 Date of next meeting

The date of the next meeting will be circulated to members in due course.

SCHOOL OF ORIENTAL AND AFRICAN STUDIES

EQUALITY COMMITTEE

Tuesday 30 May 2006

Action Points

Minute	Item	Action	Deadline	By
25(iii)	Diversity statistics on student and staff	To obtain more substantive data i.e. to include clerical/administrative staff and present to next EC	November 06	DV + HR
26(iii)	Harassment Contacts	HR and Diversity Advisor (DA) to further define role of harassment contact and clarification on contacts position in the event of a potential formal harassment complaint	ASAP	DV, DM, PM
		Diversity Advisor to revise proposal and EC to approve, subject to approval of harassment policies.	ASAP	DV
		Incoming SU Sabbatical Officers to take part in training		DV, SU
26(v)	DES	Diversity Advisor to finalise and report back to EC then onto EB and GB	November 06	DV
26(vi)	Bloomsbury Consortium	Notify other parts of the School re Disability and Equality Day.	ASAP	DV
		To update staff on the duties and role of EC within the School	October 06	DV
26(vii)	Equality Questionnaire	To discussed in greater detail at next EC meeting	November 06	
26(viii)	Race Equality Action Plan	To be revised over the summer	November 06	DV
	Race Equality Policy	Copies of current Race Equality Plan (REP) to be circulated to members for comments and feedback	ASAP	JK
26(ix)	Equality and Diversity Training	Diversity Advisor to meet with new SU Sabbatical Officers to discuss training for SU Executive	ASAP	DV
27	Academic Promotions	Diversity Advisor and HR Director to consult re staff survey	ASAP	DV,DM, PM
28	Harassment Policies	Diversity Advisor to meet with SU to discuss both harassment policies for students and staff	ASAP	DV, SU
		Both Staff and Student harassment policies to come back to EC then to GB	November 06 December 06	DM, PM
29	External Invitations Policy	Draft policy to be circulated to all staff for a period of consultation	ASAP	DM, JK
	Equality/Diversity mins 30 May 2006	To go to EC if necessary, then EB and GB		

30	Nursery Provision	<p>Information on available funding to be presented at next meeting</p> <p>HR Department to consult with the AUT and UNISON representatives on an all School-email</p> <p>Figures and feedback received would be considered by the Committee at next meeting</p> <p>Breakdown of the options available to be presented at next meeting</p>	<p>ASAP</p> <p>ASAP</p> <p>November 06</p> <p>November 06</p>	<p>DM, PM</p> <p>DM, PM, AUT, UNISON</p> <p>CMMTT</p> <p>DM, PM</p>
32	Any other business	Update on Equal Pay Audit	November 06	DV + HR