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SCHOOL OF ORIENTAL AND AFRICAN STUDIES

EQUALITY COMMITTEE

Tuesday 28 February 2006

MINUTES

Members: Professor Elisabeth Croll (Chair)
Mrs Jan Airey
Dr Fareda Banda
Ms Maxine Brown*
Dr Jeevan Deol*
Ms Jacqui Freeman
Ms Jodi Garrod*
Mr Shehryar Malik*
Mrs Domini Mitchell*
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
Peter Mitchell
Ms Serena Yeo♦
Ms Jenneh Kebbie (Minute Secretary)

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

♦ Attending for this meeting only

12 Membership and terms of reference

The Chair welcomed the new Diversity Advisor, Deb Viney, Peter Mitchell, HR Director who was attending for the first time and Serena Yeo, Staff Development Manager, who was attending for this meeting only. Apologies were received from Dr Jeevan Deol, Maxine Brown, Domini Mitchell and Jo Halliday who were unable to attend. The SU representatives were absent from this meeting.

13 Introduction to the new Diversity Advisor

Deb Viney reported that she had joined the School in the post of Diversity Advisor on 6 February 2006 and had replaced Karen Clarke. After graduating from Portsmouth as a mature student in Psychology (1989) Deb gained a wide range of experience including working in neuropsychology and later in Psychiatry. Deb also taught part time in psychology at all levels from GCSE to post-graduate. Her most recent post before joining SOAS was as Head of the Disability Service at the University of Southampton where she drew on all of her psychology skills and academic experience to develop a service with a national reputation for excellence.

14 Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 18 October 2005 were **APPROVED**, subject to the following amendments.

- (i) To include Student Union representatives names on the minutes.
- (ii) At minute 5, Impact Assessment fourth paragraph the word 'intersexuality' to be amended to read 'intersexualism'.

Members decided that the first meeting of the Committee for the next academic session would be rescheduled for a later date to accommodate the election and nomination process of the SU representatives on the Committee. It was **AGREED** that the Diversity Advisor and Jan Airey, Academic Services Manager would consult the SU in regard to this and report back to the Committee and the next meeting.

15 Matters arising

(i) *'Bringing the School into disrepute' (minute 3)*

The Chair reported that the phrase 'bringing the School into disrepute' [Appendix A], had been brought to the attention of Executive Board on 12 December 2005 and that the 'Board had agreed that the matter be referred to the HR Director to be considered as part of the current ACAS-mediated examination of the School's HR policies, procedures and practices'. The Chair said that once any legal definitions and recommendations had been provided by the ACAS mediated process the matter would come back to Equality Committee to be discussed further at a later date.

(ii) *Nursery Provisions (minute 6)*

The Committee received an update from the HR Director, Peter Mitchell on the School's current Nursery provisions. He reported that the HR Department had recently undergone a restructuring process and that he, and in particular Domini Mitchell, the HR Manager would share responsibility within the HR department for equality and diversity matters. Domini Mitchell would be working in collaboration with the Diversity Advisor and the Committee in implementing equality and diversity issues, one of which would be the School's Nursery provisions.

The nursery facilities at the Institute of Education were still undergoing refurbishment and would not be available for use until September / October 2006. At present funding for Nursery provision is limited at £14,000 per annum which would not be sufficient to establish crèche facilities. The department was looking into alternative ways in which nursery facilities could be provided, together with who should be targeted to receive any available funding. One of the possibilities could be via 'tax breaks' or the salary sacrifice scheme. Because of the limited resources, the HR Director said that he favoured targeting the lower rate tax payers with the existing £14,000 budget which would include clerical staff and some academics, as higher rate tax payers would benefit more from a salary sacrifice scheme.

It was noted that the Committee would be kept informed on any further progress in due course.

(iii) *Library issue (minute 10)*

The Chair reported that concerns expressed by a library colleague and the AUT with regard to the Library had been conveyed at Executive Board and Governing Body 31 October and 9 December 2005 respectively. The Committee also noted that this issue had been referred to the Library's Strategic Review Group. It was **AGREED** that the Committee would await the recommendations and take the matter forward at the next meeting.

(iv) *Academic Promotions (minute 7, paragraph 8)*

The Committee received an update from the Diversity Advisor who said Academic Promotions Working Group (APWG) would be sending a revised report to Academic Board at its meeting on 31 May 2006. She explained that the recommendations made at the Equality Committee's meeting of 18 October 2005 (*minute 7, Academic Promotions 2001 – 2004/5*) were outside the APWG's remit and had been referred to the Diversity Advisor. The Diversity Advisor said that she hoped to establish a research project to collect data and would circulate a suggestion on how this could be implemented. This research would then be reported to the Committee and to the School in general.

The Chair said that it would be important to make use of the Academic Promotions figures from previous Committee meetings and it was **AGREED** that the Diversity Advisor would liaise with Jan Airey, Academic Services Manager and report back at the next meeting.

16 **Staff Development Monitoring**

The Staff Development Manager, Serena Yeo presented a short report to the Committee on the new database Resourcelink monitoring system. The Resourcelink was centrally organised and would enable the monitoring of those who had attended equality and diversity training sessions. It could also keep a record of all those who had undertaken staff development courses.

Some members of the Committee were concerned that lower graded staffs were being denied access to staff development training courses by their line managers because of concerns about covering their absence. The Director of HR said that if this were the case, staff members should be encouraged to contact the HR department, who would intervene in such cases. The Committee felt that it was important that all members of staff who wished to attend training courses were permitted to do so without having to feel uncomfortable.

The Committee received a report from the Staff Development Manager, Serena Yeo, on staff who had attended equality and diversity training by Faculty, Department and Grade between, September 2004 – January 2006. She said that fewer courses had been scheduled than last year, as there was often a low take up of places therefore it was not financially viable. Although only seven people had currently applied to attend the equality and diversity courses this year, she thought that it was vital the courses remained on the Staff Development training agenda. The Chair suggested that training could be approached by (a) block training with departments and (b) updating / briefing staff members on the forthcoming new equality legislations i.e. age, gender etc

The Committee noted that there was a poor take up on the training sessions by senior academic and Heads of Department (HoDs) staff and the Committee agreed that there was a general need for all staff at all levels to attend equality and diversity training in particular academics and HoDs. The Director of HR said that it was vital that members of staff were made aware of equality issues and that training could be divided into (a) legislative updates and (b) diversity awareness. It was also important that the School recruited good trainers as this would be key to the success of the training. The Committee agreed that this should be taken forward as a question for discussion at future meeting.

The Committee discussed the idea of compulsory equality and diversity training for all members of staff, as it was agreed that staff needed to be made aware of equality and diversity issues in general and of the potential repercussions, both legally and ethically, if they were not implemented. Members discussed whether this should be attended as an all day or half day event. Members felt that whilst a compulsory equality and diversity training session was good practice, not all staff members would take kindly to being made to attend, and as a result could have negative outcomes.

It was **AGREED** that the Staff Development Manager and the Diversity Advisor would work in partnership on ways in which to develop equality and diversity training for staff and that the Committee would await details and feedback from both of them at the next meeting.

17 **Report of the Equality Committee 2004 – 05 to the Governing Body**

The Committee noted that the Report of the Equality Committee 2004 – 05 to the Governing Body [Appendix B] by Karen Clarke, the former Diversity Advisor had been approved by Governing Body. Some members felt that the report itself did not represent the views of the Committee and that the report was a very general document which did not relay in detail exactly what the Committee had worked on throughout the year. The Committee agreed that it would like to see in addition more detailed statistical data included in future reports.

The Committee **AGREED** that the next report of the Equality Committee to Governing Body should be a more substantial report in terms of content, which would include the production of statistical information e.g. the HESA returns together with recommendations to Governing Body. The Committee also suggested that the report should receive a wider circulation i.e. published on the intranet.

18 Impact Assessment Report

The Chair reiterated disappointment in the 2003/04 Impact Assessment final report. The Diversity Advisor said that the report would be made available to all members of the Committee electronically (*it was subsequently circulated on paper*). Once read, the Chair asked the Committee to pay particular attention to how the effectiveness of any policies or procedures could be measured.

The Director of HR suggested that it was important to ascertain both more qualitative data and statistical information. This could be gathered and highlighted in a more specific way with an equality audit by which generic processes for a number of policies across the School could be analysed in greater depth and could identify any potential problem areas.

It was **AGREED** that the Report would be circulated to members as soon as possible and feedback and recommendations on the basis of the report would be considered at the next meeting.

19 Harassment Policies

- (a) The Student Policy had been referred back to the Deputy Secretary for further changes.
- (b) The Committee received the Staff Harassment Policy [Appendix D]. The Director of HR told members that the policy had yet to be agreed. It was **AGREED** that the policy would be looked at in greater detail by the Committee at a later date, with the following suggestions and recommendations to be taken into account:
 - 1) Point 4, 'stalking' to be included as an example of unacceptable behaviour.
 - 2) Point 8, 'The School expects all senior staff to ensure that this policy and procedure is adhered to at all times'. 'expects all senior staff' should be amended to read 'all staff'.
 - 3) Point 22, at fifth bullet point 'Any other similar incidents'. Sentence to be made more specific.

Members said that some of the issues that could bring about an alleged harassment complaint were debatable and that there was a fine line between a lecturer actively encouraging a student to work hard, which many lecturers regarded as part of their job and a student's perception of being bullied. The Diversity Advisor said that she would investigate the possibility of putting examples of alleged harassment complaints onto the diversity webpage, together with other types of alleged incidents that fall into certain categories and asked committee members to email examples.

The Director of HR informed the Committee that the existing draft policy dated 2003 had never been formally agreed and that at present SOAS did not have a signed, agreed Harassment Policy. The Unison member believed that a dangerous precedent would be set if non-agreed policies were used to investigate a complaint of harassment against a member of staff and questioned whether this practice was ethically correct as the policies had not been ratified.

The Director of HR replied that all the policies had been discussed with both UNISON and AUT representatives and that a non-agreed harassment policy had not been used to investigate an alleged case of harassment. The current case in process had been processed using the Staff Disciplinary policy.

The Harassment Policy had not been discussed at the recent ACAS negotiations. Members asked for more clarification with regard to the criteria of how policies and procedures are ratified. The Director of HR informed the Committee that each time changes are made to any policy it goes back to the start of the process and then has to be agreed by the various Committees together with UNISON and the AUT. He pointed out that if a case of alleged harassment occurs and no current policy exists at the time, the School will normally adhere to the most recent policy available. He informed the Committee that many of the Schools equality policies were in draft form. The Chair said that the process of finalising and signing off policies was an important one. It was **AGREED** that the Committee should receive clarification of which policies are and are not agreed by the HR Director by the next meeting.

20 Equality Survey

The Diversity Advisor tabled a paper giving brief details of the raw results of the Equality Survey conducted last year. She pointed out to members that the results had yet to be subjected to detailed analysis. Areas such as bullying, disability, racism and religion where incidences of alleged inequality appeared to be were areas that would be looked at in more detail. It was **AGREED** that the Diversity Advisor would circulate a detailed report with regard to the survey's findings together with the figures provided and that the Committee would discuss this at its next meeting.

21 Incoming legislation in the equality and diversity area

The Committee received a summary prepared by the Diversity Advisor with regard to forthcoming legislation [Appendix E]. She said that the School had in place a number of policies which addressed equality issues and that these would be reviewed to ensure that they met the requirements of the incoming legislation. She would also propose any amendments and draft new policies as appropriate.

The following policies would be reviewed and or developed.

- (a) Age (to be developed)
- (b) Disability (to be reviewed)
- (c) Gender (to be developed)
- (d) Race / ethnicity (to be reviewed)
- (e) Religion / belief (to be reviewed)
- (f) Sexuality (to be reviewed)
- (g) Transsexualism (to be developed)

The Diversity Advisor informed members that the Disability Equality Scheme would need to be published by 4 December 2006. She would therefore have the first draft ready by the next meeting of Equality Committee. She also pointed out that the Gender equality duty in April 2007 would probably result in an evaluation of all posts for equality of pay.

22 Staff Policies

The Committee received the proposed new School procedures [Appendices F, G, H I] which had been negotiated at the recent ACAS talks between the School, the AUT and Unison. The Director of HR notified members that the papers received by members were not the most current versions of the documents. The Director HR expressed some concern with how the Human Resource policies had been implemented throughout the years and that this was an area in which the department would be looking into.

The Committee was concerned that staff perceptions of grievance procedures and staff policies as a whole was uncertain. Many members of staff did not complain, which the Committee thought could be as a result of lack of information about the process itself. Members thought it important to provide documentation and information on the policies at all staff levels. The HR Director assured the Committee that if members of staff notified the HR Department of a potential complaint, it would be thoroughly investigated by the Department. Because of the restructuring of the HR Department, this may be easier for staff to do. The HR Director told the Committee that designated teams within the department now dealt with different sections of the School. He said that more information with regard to this would be made available to staff.

Members asked at which point in the disciplinary process would the involvement of the law become necessary and whether the School had an obligation to inform the police of any misconduct by staff members. The Director of HR said that the HR department would deal with any issues of gross misconduct internally and that the School would make an informed judgement with regard to the outcome of the disciplinary process and if necessary would notify the police.

The Chair suggested that members gave comments and recommendations from an equality and diversity viewpoint which when updated would be filtered through to the next version of the staff policies. The Committee **AGREED** that there should be training sessions on all policies once they had been formally agreed, as it was vital that members of staff become acquainted with the new policies.

23 Date of next meeting

The Committee **AGREED** that the next meeting would be held at a later time of 10am and not 9am. The next meeting will be held on Tuesday 30 May 2006 at 10am in room 116.