

# SCHOOL OF ORIENTAL AND AFRICAN STUDIES

## EQUALITY COMMITTEE

Tuesday 24 May 2005

### MINUTES

**Members:** Professor Elisabeth Croll (Chair)  
Mrs Jan Airey  
Dr Fareda Banda  
Ms Maxine Brown\*  
Ms Jacqui Freeman\*  
Ms Karuna Herrmann\*  
Professor Werner F Menski  
Dr Akin Oyetade  
Mr Joff Price\*  
Dr Timon Screech\*  
Mrs Jean Tullet

**In attendance:** Mrs Karen Clarke (Executive Secretary)  
Ms Zoë Davis  
Ms Jo Halliday\*  
Mr Terry Harvey  
Tina Ohagwa♦

Ms Jenneh Kebbie (Minute Secretary)

♦ *Representing HR*

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

**19** The Chair welcomed the interim HR Manager, Tina Ohagwa, who was attending for the first time. Apologies were received from Ms Jo Halliday and Mr Joff Price.

### **20 Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting held on 1 March 2005 were **APPROVED**, subject to the following amendments.

- (i) To delete the asterisk from Professor Werner Menski's name and to insert an asterisk next to Terry Harvey's name.
- (ii) In minute 14, Draft Disability Policy *Appendix 4, Number of Disabled students at SOAS*. The academic session should be amended to read 2003/04.

## 21 Matters arising

### (i) *Nursery provision*

The interim HR Manager, Tina Ohagwa, tabled a paper on the possibility of introducing a voucher scheme. She explained to the Committee that childcare vouchers could be offered in three different ways. The first scheme was the Salary Sacrifice, which was the most commonly used. A parent could elect to substitute part of their salary for vouchers. This would involve a deduction from an employee's normal salary in return for childcare vouchers for up to £50 per week, saving the tax and NIC which would otherwise be paid on that amount of salary.

The second was the Straight Benefit scheme in which vouchers could be given as contribution towards the cost of childcare. The employer would decide who was eligible and how much they would like to contribute in addition to salary.

The third, the Flexible Benefit scheme would offer the employee the opportunity to receive vouchers instead of an alternative or in part payment of salary. The employee would be tied in for the duration of the pre-set time period. This could be altered if they experienced a life style change.

The Chair said that it was important to have documentation on the School's existing scheme before proper consideration could be given to this matter and suggested that Graeme Appleby, the Head of Finance, be asked to investigate the financial implications of developing a scheme. It was **AGREED** that the HR Department would be asked to provide a report for the next meeting giving details of the support currently given to staff, with the pros and cons of introducing a voucher scheme.

### (ii) *Update on the closure of the IOE nursery*

The Diversity Advisor informed the Committee that since the closure of the Institute of Education's (IoE) nursery facilities last December, it was difficult to say how SOAS parents had been affected. She had been told that alternative facilities had been found for the children and that the nursery would re-open in September 2006. The Diversity Advisor said that she was a member of the Bloomsbury Consortium's Nursery Group and that the possibility of the smaller colleges providing joint nursery facilities was being explored. The Chair said she looked forward to hearing more on this at subsequent meetings.

## 22 Recruitment Policy

The Committee received the Recruitment Policy from the interim HR Manager. The policy had been to Staffing Committee, however, it was unclear whether the policy had been to any other committees for comment. The issue regarding the selection process of interim staff was raised and members felt that interim staff should be subjected to the same equality procedures as full and part-time staff. The Chair replied that all job vacancies were advertised publicly and that the Executive Board was responsible for making the final decision with regard to appointments. The Academic Registrar said that the policy did not mention what levels of staff could participate in conducting interviews, in particular those staff involved in interviewing outside of their department. The Chair and the Diversity Advisor replied that the draft recruitment procedure gave clarity on this point. The Committee said that it was essential that this point should be cross-referenced with the Recruitment Policy.

Committee members identified several grammatical and procedural errors in the policy. It was **AGREED** that members would give their comments to Tina Ohagwa who would pass them on to Emily Crofts, the HR Manager responsible for drafting the policy. The Chair thanked Tina for her contribution and asked her to convey the Committee's thanks to Emily for her considerable work on the policy.

## **23 Disability Liaison Group (DLG)**

The Committee received the DLG membership from the Student Disability Advisor, Zoë Davis. The Chair recommended reducing the membership list. If and when necessary the group could always invite externals to meetings. It was **AGREED** that the Student Disability Advisor would make the following amendments to the DLG terms of reference.

- (i) The membership of the DLG would comprise of the following:
  - Disability Advisor
  - Faculty Disability Advisor from each of the Faculties
  - Learning Advisor from the LTU
  - Head of Reader Services in the Library
  - Two members of the academic staff
  - Assistant Registrar (Examinations)
  - Central Services Manager
  - Diversity Advisor
  - Head of student services
  - 2 student members
  - Human Resources Manager
- (ii) The remit of the Group would be amended to read as follows: '*The remit of the Group is to discuss disability issues as they relate to staff and students within the School. This includes looking at the development of best practice in learning and teaching, student services, admissions, staff recruitment, the working environment, and general support for students and staff. This list is by not means exhaustive and the Group will consider other issues as appropriate*'.
- (iii) The Group's terms of reference at (a) and (b) would be amended to read as follows:
  - a. *To identify areas where change is necessary;*
  - b. *To develop and propose solutions and review their effectiveness;*

The Chair thanked the Student Disability Advisor, the Diversity Advisor and the Academic Services Manager, Jan Airey for their work.

## **24 Staff Equality Survey**

The Diversity Advisor asked for feedback on the computer based equality survey. She explained that once started, it was important to complete the survey as the system navigated users to different pages according to their answers. The Chair pointed out that at present the weblink to the survey was only accessible to members of the Committee and that once the content had been agreed, it would be made available to all staff.

The Committee expressed concerns regarding anonymity. Members felt that the details of an alleged discrimination could potentially identify the person/persons involved. The Committee sought clarification on how sensitive information was dealt with, so that

members of staff were not deterred from disclosing information. The Diversity Advisor said that due to the relatively small number of staff there would be a possibility of identifying people who said they were being discriminated against. However, she assured the Committee that the information collated by the survey would be totally independent of interference from anyone in SOAS as the data would only be accessible to the provider who would produce general statistical reports for her when requested.

Fareda Banda asked whether there could be a differentiation between academic and administrative staff as she said that the complexities of potential discriminatory issues would be different for both groups and that it was necessary that a distinction between the two made was made. The Diversity Advisor replied that this was an important issue to consider and it was **AGREED** that she would request that the designers incorporate the additional categories of academic and administrative staff and report back to the Committee at the next meeting.

## **25 Equality and Diversity Policy**

The Diversity Advisor informed the Committee that the revised policy had been to Executive Board who had agreed the revisions and would be going to Governing Body on 10 June 2005. The Diversity Advisor said that the Grievance and Disciplinary procedure was currently being reviewed and that once it had been updated a link would be added to reflect this in the new policies. The Academic Registrar, Terry Harvey, said that Executive Board had now approved the Admissions Policy.

## **26 Harassment Policies**

The Chair said that the harassment policies had gone to Executive Board on 23 May 2005 and that the Diversity Advisor would review its recommendations. The Chair explained that the purpose of the document was to have a procedure that was somewhere between an initial informal grievance and a formal one, with the focus being on investigating alleged reports of harassment.

The Committee asked whether an alleged harasser would be made aware of a complaint against them and if so, would they be given the opportunity to respond? The Diversity Advisor replied that the harasser would be informed. If, however a harassed person requested confidentiality this would always be respected. The Chair reiterated that it was not part of School procedure to disclose confidential information and it was important that this was documented in the policy.

The Student Disability Advisor informed members that a number of students had felt that members of staff had allegedly bullied them. However, student's expectations of the School being capable of dealing with this effectively were very low. She said that the School needed to be aware of this attitude amongst students and put in place measures to boost confidence in the system by encouraging them to come forward to report incidents.

Werner Menski pointed out that, from a staff member's prospective there was a fine line between a lecturer actively encouraging a student to work hard and a students' perception of being bullied. The Diversity Advisor said that with the necessary policies and procedures it should not be difficult to make a distinction between the two.

The Diversity Advisor said that she was investigating the possibility of having bullying and harassment advisors. They would provide a network of support for both students and staff

and would be fully trained. She informed members that she would report on its progress at a future meeting of the Committee.

It was **AGREED** that the Diversity Advisor would make alterations to the policy either before Governing Body on 10 June or for their meeting in November 2005. The amended policies would be circulated to Committee members via email.

**27 Impact Assessment Report**

The Diversity Advisor reported to the Committee that she had not yet received the results of the Impact Assessment exercise and was therefore unable to comment on its results. The Chair said that she was committed in sharing the results with members and that they would be disseminated once it had been received. It was **AGREED** that the outcome of the exercise would receive maximum attention and that this item would be put on the agenda at the first meeting of the next session.

**29 Any other business**

Fareda Banda requested a breakdown of the results of the Promotions exercise for 2004/05 for applicants and successful candidates with regard to race and sex for the last five years. It was **AGREED** that this would be put on the agenda at the first meeting of the next session in October.

**30 Date of next meeting**

To date of the next meeting will be arranged in due course.