

SCHOOL OF ORIENTAL AND AFRICAN STUDIES

EQUALITY COMMITTEE

Tuesday 1 March 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*
Mr Rory Howie*
Ms Jenneh Kebbie (Minute Secretary)

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

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The Chair welcomed Professor Werner Wenski, who was attending for the first time. Apologies were received from Ms Jo Halliday, Mr Terry Harvey, Ms Maxine Brown, Dr Akin Oyetade and Dr Timon Screech.

12 Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 12 October 2005 were **APPROVED**.

13 Matters arising

(i) Voucher Scheme for payment of nursery provision

In the absence of the HR Director, it was **AGREED** that a written report on the Scheme should be submitted to the next meeting.

The Committee was informed that due to refurbishment, the nursery facilities at the Institute of Education were not available to SOAS students. The Diversity Adviser said that she had not been made aware of the current situation. The Chair asked the Diversity Adviser to contact the Institute of Education and find out how many staff/students are directly affected by this decision and provide a report to the Committee at the next meeting.

(ii) *Mechanisms for Consultation*

The Diversity Adviser said that she had contacted Students' Union (SU) and Trades Union (TU) representatives to find out methods used to consult with members. Replies from TU representatives indicated a similar approach to consultation: emails were circulated to the membership and issues were discussed at meetings of the executive. The SU representatives informed the Committee that once a term they informed members of the Students' Union Executive of equality issues and members were encouraged to raise any concerns they might have. The SU representatives also said that their email addresses had been published on the Students' Union website and on notice boards around the School.

(iii) *Equal Opportunity staff survey*

The Diversity Adviser said that, following the circulation of the survey to committee members on 9 November 2004, it had been returned to the designers for further development. An updated version of the survey will be circulated to members once it becomes available. The Diversity Adviser said that the survey aimed at Disability had yet to be explored.

The Diversity Adviser also informed the Committee that the Purchasing Manager, Rob Godfrey, had started giving contractors the School's Equality and Diversity policy. She explained that this was a requirement under the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000 and that Rob Godfrey had done a good job in ensuring that the School complies with the Law in relation to procurement practices. The Chair asked the Diversity Adviser to convey the Committee's thanks to Mr Godfrey, for the work he had done in this area.

(iv) *Clarification of a person's disability*

The Student Disability Adviser, Zoë Davis, explained the procedure for clarifying whether a student had a disability. She said that a medical certificate from a doctor would be required to provide proof of a person's disability as the Examinations Office would be reluctant to provide assistance without it. The Chair said that it was important for staff to be aware of the procedure and of that fact that help on disability issues is available from specialist bodies outside the School.

(v) *Impact Assessment*

The Diversity Adviser said that she was unable to give an update on the Impact Assessment exercise as the report had not yet been received. She was, however, concerned about the low student response rate to the invitation to take part in interviews. Jacqui Freeman queried the degree to which the names of those who participated remained confidential. The Diversity Adviser assured the Committee that she was the only person involved in arranging the interviews. No one else was involved in the process therefore the names of the interviewees were known only to herself and the consultant carrying out the interviews.

The Committee discussed how the report would be disseminated once it had been received. The Chair pointed out that it was important to respond to the report

constructively and that this could be achieved by stating ways in which the issues raised would be addressed. The Chair said that the Diversity Adviser would give a presentation on the outcomes of the report to the Executive Body and that a summary of the report would be circulated to Equality Committee. It was **AGREED** that the Diversity Adviser would give a report to the Committee on the results of the Impact Assessment exercise at the next meeting.

(vi) *Draft Policies, Draft Harassment Policy*

The Diversity Adviser informed members that, due to Jo Halliday's absence because of illness, they had not discussed how decisions were made in complaints of harassment. It was **AGREED** that this item would be put on the agenda of the next meeting.

(vii) *Attendees for Equality and Diversity Training*

The Committee received a report from the Diversity Adviser on attendees for Equality and Diversity Training from September 2004 to November 2004. The Diversity Adviser stated that the profile of the staff on the training had been assumed by the Staff Development Interim Manager, Antonella De Luca O'Neil. It was suggested by members that it would be useful to know the number of people within each department in order to accurately analyse them.

The Chair said that the report appeared to show that administrative staff had been more willing to participate in the training than academic staff. She said that Deans should be asked to encourage Academic Heads of Departments and personal tutors to participate in the training being offered. The Chair said that she hoped the numbers of Academic staff attending future Equality and Diversity training courses would improve.

The Diversity Adviser said that the attendance at the Students' Union briefing session on equality had been poor. The Students' Union representatives pointed out that it would be better to have a session with the Students' Union Executive and they were asked to raise this issue at future Executive meetings. The Chair also asked the Diversity Adviser to pursue this.

14 **Draft Disability Policy**

The Committee received the Draft Disability Policy. Since the last meeting changes had been made to take account of comments from Staffing Committee, Faculty Learning & Teaching Committee and Learning & Teaching Policy Committee. The Academic Registrar, Terry Harvey had also emailed comments for consideration by the Committee.

The Chair suggested that the wording on some points needed greater clarification. It was **AGREED** that the Diversity Adviser and the Student Disability Adviser would make the following amendments to the policy.

- (i) Section 5, *Code of Practice Relating to Students*
- (a) *Admissions*, point (v) should be amended to read 'invite applicants to declare their disability at the time of application and to discuss their needs with the Student Disability Adviser'.
 - (b) *Curriculum and Assessment*, point (iv) should be amended to read 'seek to provide at least a minimum of support in accessing the curriculum

to home disabled students who have applied for, but are not yet in receipt of, funding for disability support'.

(b) Curriculum and Assessment, at point (v) the word 'access' should be replaced with 'complete'.

The Student Disability Adviser stated that the resource implications could be substantial and that she did not have the means to make this assessment for a student. She also questioned whether it would be practical to offer this. The Chair replied that it was essential to make it clear to students what was available and that it was a matter of managing students' expectations. She also said that the possibility of acquiring funds from external sources to support disabled students should be investigated.

The issue of reasonable adjustment was raised, as the law was unclear on this issue in relation to students' year abroad and made no provision for international students. The Chair said that it would be helpful if students were encouraged to declare their disability at the earliest opportunity in order to assess their needs.

(d) International applicant/students, at points (i) and (ii) all references to the word 'students' should be replaced with 'applicants'.

- (ii) Section 6, *Code of Practice on Employment*
 - (a) The Disability Discrimination Act (1995)*, point (i) should be amended to reflect equal access to jobs as follows: 'seek to give equal access to employment opportunities for people with disabilities'.
- (iii) Section 7, *Members of the Public*

The final sentence should be amended to read 'Visitors to the library are to be referred to the Library Disability Policy'.
- (iv) *Appendix 4, Number of Disabled students at SOAS*

The academic session 2003/04 to be inserted after 'SOAS'.
- (v) In the *Draft Advice on the delivery of teaching to students with disabilities*

At the eleventh bullet point, the word 'prioritising' should be replaced with 'accommodating'.

The Chair said that communicating the policy would be important and therefore the document should be accessible to all staff. The Chair suggested that the Student Disability Adviser and Diversity Adviser consider writing an executive summary aimed specifically at academic staff and one aimed at other members of staff referring them to the policy. It was **AGREED** that the Diversity Adviser would email all academic staff with regard to the policy.

It was **AGREED** that the policy would be modified in line with the above comments and sent to Executive Board for approval and then to Governing Body. The committee thanked the Student Disability Adviser and Diversity Adviser for their work on the policy.

15 Sexual Orientation Policy

The Diversity Adviser reported to the Committee that the policy had been to the Staffing Committee and Trades Union. The Chair asked the Diversity Adviser to rephrase the final paragraph under '*Explanation of Terms, Heterosexism*'. It was **AGREED** that the policy would be modified in line with the above comments and sent to Executive Board for approval and then to Governing Body.

16 Religion and Belief Policy

The Committee received the draft Policy on Sexual Orientation from the Diversity Adviser.

The Committee made one change. At point 3, *Religious Observance*, the words 'a suitable' should be deleted.

The Students' Union said that the Islamic Society was dissatisfied with the facilities for prayers, they felt that this was an important issue, given the School had a significant number of Islamic students. The Chair replied that the School had made a reasonable response in providing a space to accommodate prayers. The Diversity Adviser said that she was unaware of this problem and she suggested that this matter be put as an item on the agenda at the next Students' Union Executive meeting. It was **AGREED** that the Diversity Adviser would assess the situation and make recommendation and would also liaise with Karuna Herrmann and Joff Price. It was noted that the policy was aimed at employees, however a policy for students would be drafted and presented to the Committee at a later time. It was **AGREED** that the Diversity Adviser would send it to Executive Board for approval and then to Governing Body.

17 Disability Liaison Group (DLG)

The Committee considered a proposal from the Student Disability Adviser on the formation of a disability liaison sub group. This would allow for complex issues to be examined in greater detail. The Academic Services Manager, Jan Airey suggested that the DLG should be formed as a working group of Equality Committee as opposed to a sub-committee. This would allow flexibility, as the memberships of working groups were often changeable. The Committee was informed that working groups did not appear in the SOAS Calendar. It was suggested that a diagram be included in the Calendar indicating that the DLG was a working group of Equality Committee. This would help to make people aware of the group's existence. The Committee would request that Governing Body change the terms of reference of Equality Committee to allow for additional people to join the group. Jan Airey also explained that the Executive Board would need to give approval for the Equality Committee to have working groups.

It was **AGREED** that the Diversity Adviser would liaise with the Academic Services Manager, Jan Airey, to draft a paper to Executive Board and report back to the Committee at the next meeting.

18 Date of next meeting

The next scheduled meeting date will be on Tuesday 24 May at 9.00am, Room 116, Russell Square.