

**SCHOOL OF ORIENTAL AND AFRICAN STUDIES**

**EQUALITY COMMITTEE**

**Tuesday 12 October 2004**

**MINUTES**

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

**In attendance:** Mrs Karen Clarke (Executive Secretary)  
Ms Zoë Davis  
Ms Jo Halliday  
Mr Terry Harvey  
Mr Rory Howie  
Miss 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 Mr Joff Price and Ms Kuruna Hermann, the new Students' Union representatives, Ms Jacqui Freeman, the UNISON representative, Mrs Jean Tullet, the non-academic staff representative, and Miss Jenneh Kebbie, the new minute secretary. Apologies were received from Professor Werner F Menski, who was unable to attend.

The Committee noted the membership and terms of reference [Appendix A].

**2 Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting held on 13 May were **APPROVED**.

**3 Matters arising**

(i) *Staff Grievances*

The HR Director, Rory Howie, tabled a report giving figures on staff grievances. Fareda Banda said that the figures on tribunal cases showed that a disproportionate number of staff of African Caribbean origin had gone to tribunals. The Committee noted the implications raised and agreed to keep the figures under review.

(ii) *Nursery review*

The Diversity Advisor gave a brief update on the progress of her investigations into nursery provision. The possibility of SOAS having its own nursery remained remote. The nursery at Birkbeck College was prepared to take children of SOAS students and staff. This was not a new arrangement and the Welfare Officers at SOAS had been giving this information to students. The Diversity Advisor pointed out that as long as places were available at Birkbeck College they would continue to accept applications from students and staff at SOAS. The Committee expressed their gratitude for this service and would like to continue this relationship.

It was noted that staff at SOAS had access to a voucher scheme. The HR Director said that the voucher scheme would be discussed at the next Resources Committee, and he would report back to the Equality Committee in due course.

(iii) *Mechanisms for consultation*

The Diversity Advisor reiterated the need to communicate with individual members of the Committee about ways in which they consulted with the groups they represented. It was **AGREED** that she would contact members individually.

(iv) *Religion and Belief*

It was reported by the Diversity Advisor that the draft policy on Religion and Belief had been amended and sent to the Staffing Committee for their consideration. The policy would then come back to the Committee before going to Executive Board.

(v) *Disability Policy*

The Diversity Advisor said that the Faculty Learning and Teaching Committees' responses to the Draft Disability Policy were favourable. However, concerns were raised about the process for verifying whether students had a disability. Committee members wanted to know what mechanisms SOAS had in place to clarify whether a person had a disability. It was **AGREED** that Karen Clarke would report back to the Committee with clarification.

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

The Diversity Advisor reported on the work carried out during 2003/04.

- (i) Members were informed that the new Equality and Diversity Policy was now on the Equality and Diversity website and thanked Jenneh Kebbie for her contribution to building it. The website would be constantly reviewed and updated. The Diversity Advisor invited members of the Committee to share information on equality issues. It was also reported that the Equality Committee minutes were on the School's website and that further statistical reports on monitoring would be included in due course.
- (ii) It was reported that a new series of training events run by consultants were being delivered as part of the implementation of the Equality and Diversity Policy. The Diversity Advisor spoke of the importance of participation in the training which, in the first instance, was targeted at Managers and Heads of Departments because of their position to influence staff. Jackie Freeman said that the Committee needed to consider why attendance at the training was low and look at ways of encouraging staff to attend. The Chair said that monitoring data from the equality training

sessions should be reviewed once the training had been completed and the findings shared with the Committee. The Diversity Advisor encouraged Committee members to attend the training.

- (iii) The Committee was asked to consider a computer-based Equal Opportunity staff survey, whereby individuals were asked to input data regarding themselves. The Diversity Advisor informed the Committee that this would involve financial resources. The Committee was informed by the Diversity Advisor that, as she did not have a budget, funding would have to be negotiated as the survey would cost between £500-800 for staff but would be more expensive for students. The survey could be completed on line and was therefore less time consuming for the user. 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 reports as requested.

Fareda Banda sought clarification on whether the system was able to identify race and gender. She said that many monitoring systems rendered the experiences from minority ethnic peoples as void. The Diversity Advisor replied that she has been informed that the response rate of previous users was 90% and that the system would be able to give a breakdown of staff on the basis of ethnicity, gender or any other variable built into the survey. The system could give users the choice of identifying themselves or declining this information and some fields could be made mandatory. It would also be possible to modify the survey for students if a student survey was needed. It was **AGREED** that the Diversity Advisor would circulate a sample survey seeking the views of EC members.

The Disability Officer said that training packages on disability issues were also available on the web. It was **AGREED** that this would be put on the agenda of the next Equality Committee.

## **5 New Legislation**

The Committee received an update from the Diversity Advisor on the Gender Recognition Act, which was enacted on 1 July 2004, but would not come into effect until 2005. The Diversity Advisor said that this would have implications for SOAS and the service it provided for those people transitioning from one gender to another.

An information leaflet giving the implications for employers was tabled. An equivalent leaflet for students had not yet been produced. It was noted that future versions of the Equality and Diversity Policy would include references to gender reassignment. It was **AGREED** that a policy on Gender Reassignment would be drafted to coincide with the implementation of the Act in 2005.

## **6 Draft Policies**

### **(i) Draft Harassment Policy**

The Committee was asked to consider the draft Harassment Policy for students. It was noted that the Committee had reviewed the Draft Harassment Policy for staff at a previous meeting. The following staff amendments were agreed:

- a) the language should be amended to reflect student, not staff, concerns;
- b) closer cross-referencing with staff harassment policy;
- c) para 14 should state who will make decisions regarding the separation of parties involved in a complaint;
- d) para 17 should state how the panel for the formal hearing would be constituted.

Fareda Banda expressed concern at the constitution of panels hearing complaints of harassment. The Chair replied by saying not only did SOAS take this matter seriously, but it was a matter of policy that panels represent a cross-section of the School.

The HR Director noted that the document did not clearly state who made various decisions. The Diversity Advisor **AGREED** to look at the protocols surrounding decision making and report back to the next Equality Committee.

The Disability Officer expressed concern regarding the Harassment Policy's position in dealing with matters that involved criminal law e.g. rape. She wanted to know whether it was the School's policy to take action on matters that could go to court. It was **AGREED** that the Diversity Advisor would report back to Equality Committee with clarification on this.

## **(ii) Guidelines on Teaching Disabled Students**

The Committee considered the draft Guidelines on Teaching Disabled Students from the Diversity Advisor and Disability Officer. The Diversity Advisor pointed out that the document was a guideline and should be read in conjunction with the draft Disability Policy which had been considered at a previous meeting. The Diversity Advisor **AGREED** to send copies of the Disability Policy to new members of the Equality Committee.

The Diversity Advisor said that the draft Policy and Guidelines were to be considered by Faculty Learning & Teaching Committees and the Learning & Teaching Policy Committee and would be seen by Equality Committee before going to Executive Board.

The Disability Officer said that some lecturers refused to allow students to tape lectures. It was suggested that relevant students should alert teachers to the fact that the taping of their lectures was essential in carrying out their studies. It was also noted that this was in keeping with good practice. It was **AGREED** that the taping of lectures would be included in the policy.

## **7 Training**

In the absence of a Staff Development Manager, the Diversity Advisor gave an update on equality training events. She reported that general awareness training was currently being delivered by consultants and that two sessions had been cancelled due to poor take-up by staff. Akin Oyetade suggested that the reason for the poor attendance may have been due to the training being provided at the beginning of term which was a demanding time in the academic year. The Diversity Advisor said there was a possibility of running the sessions again in 2005, but that this would have to be negotiated with the new Staff Development Manager. The HR Director, Rory Howie, said that if this pattern continued it would be cause for concern as the sessions had

been structured to allow the maximum number of people to attend. It was **AGREED** that the Diversity Advisor would provide a breakdown of the persons who had attended the training and that the data should be brought before the Committee once it became available.

The HR Director acknowledged Jo Price, the former Staff Development Manager, who had made a considerable contribution by ensuring the implementation of the Equality Training frameworks.

## **8 Undergraduate Student Retention – 2001 and 2002 intakes**

The Committee considered a paper from Terry Harvey, the Academic Registrar, giving an analysis of undergraduate student withdrawals. He said that there had been a high level of withdrawal amongst undergraduates and there that this was an area that needed to be kept under review by monitoring on a regular basis. The Academic Registrar also explained that, in an attempt to show a fair split between faculties, students doing joint degrees were represented in two faculties. Consequently, the data represented FTE student numbers as opposed to actual numbers.

The following points were highlighted.

- i. The withdrawal rates for students by faculty for 2001 and 2002 were relatively consistent and did not show significant variations.
- ii. Withdrawal rates for students by faculty and gender correlated to the ratio of students for both the 2001 and 2002 UG intakes with very little variation between faculties. Overall however, withdrawal rates were slightly higher for male students.
- iii. Data on students with disabilities was too small to provide meaningful statistical analysis. However, figures suggest that disabled students are more likely to withdraw and that most withdrawals within this group come from those declaring dyslexia.
- iv. The withdrawal of students by Declared Ethnic Group showed that in 2001 the total number of withdrawals amongst white students (55%) was more than withdrawals amongst non-white students (45%). It was noted that 'white' included English, Scottish, Irish, and Welsh students, while 'non-white' were not categorised in this manner.

The Committee suggested that the analysis presented by the Academic Registrar be broken down into more specific areas covering age and ethnic groupings used on the student monitoring database. It was **AGREED** that the Academic Registrar would prepare a paper giving a statistical analysis on withdrawals by reference to age.

The Committee discussed the need for student exit interviews to find out the reasons for the high withdrawal rate amongst first year undergraduate students. The Diversity Advisor said that she been informed that a report on withdrawal rates was being prepared by the Widening Participation Co-ordinator. It was noted that the information within that report would reflect the type of analysis required by the Committee in acquiring a realistic breakdown.

Members queried whether students with disabilities had been given the opportunity to declare their disability. The Disability Officer and Academic Registrar explained that students were given the opportunity to declare their disability on registration forms

and that the statistical information was taken from this on student withdrawal. However, some students did not declare or did so late. Students could also declare on their UCAS forms or anytime during the course of their studies. It was also pointed out to the Committee that this information could be kept confidential if requested by a student. The Students' Union representatives said that the information students received via email regarding disability had been informative. The Chair thanked Terry Harvey for providing the information.

**9 Any other business**

New members were given copies of the booklet 'Equal Opportunities, A guide for members of the Equality Committee'. The Chair thanked Committee members and made special mention of the Diversity Advisor for her work over the past year.

**10 Date of next meeting**

The next scheduled meeting date will be on Tuesday 1 March at 9.00am in room 116, Russell Square.