

SCHOOL OF ORIENTAL AND AFRICAN STUDIES

EQUALITY COMMITTEE

Thursday 29 January 2004

MINUTES

Members: Professor Elisabeth Croll (Chair)
Mrs Jan Airey
Dr Fareda Banda
Dr Stephanie Blankenburg*
Ms Antonia Bright
Mr Omar El-Kheiry*
Ms Nazima Joomun*
Mr Awad Joumaa *
Mr Ravi Nadarajah*
Dr Akin Oyetade
Dr Timon Screech

In attendance: Mrs Karen Clarke (Executive Secretary)
Ms Zoë Davis*
Ms Jo Halliday
Mr Terry Harvey
Mr Rory Howie
Miss Jennifer Crosk (Minute Secretary)

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

1 Membership

The Chair welcomed Dr Stephanie Blankenburg and Dr Akin Oyetade, who are the new Faculty representatives for Law and Social Sciences and Languages and Cultures respectively. Jennifer Crosk was also welcomed as the new minute secretary. Thanks were given to Raechel Leigh Carter for the previous minutes and action points and her contribution to the Equality Committee as minute secretary.

2 Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 23 October 2003 were **APPROVED**.

3 Matters Arising

(i) *Student Grievances*

The Deputy Secretary reported that a grievance procedure was already in place for students to use and published in the Student Handbooks and on the web. It was reported that last year there were approximately 20 student grievances, none of which were of a sexual or racial nature. It was **AGREED** that the Deputy Secretary would

analyse and categorise student grievances for the last academic year (2002/3) and report back to the Committee at the next meeting.

(ii) *Staff Grievances*

The HR Director tabled a report giving a summary of formal grievances and tribunal applications. The HR Director pointed out that there had been five applications in the last three years. Analysis showed a trend whereby cases went straight to Tribunal, possibly due to individuals' perceived lack of confidence with the internal grievance procedure. The Committee acknowledged that consideration had to be given to confidentiality when reporting on grievances. It was **AGREED** that, as a good proportion of these cases came under the Committee's remit, the report should be kept as a rolling template with more categories being added, as required. The information would remain general in order to protect identity.

(iii) *Equality Committee Guide*

The Committee members received an Equality Guide. Members considered that the Guide was helpful and would be useful for Equality Committee members in the future, and might also have wider distribution. Members were asked to feed back any comments to the Diversity Adviser, who would finalise the Guide for distribution.

4. Introduction to the work of the Widening Participation Co-ordinator

Marva de la Coudray, the new Widening Participation Co-ordinator, introduced herself and gave an overview of the work of the Widening Participation Co-ordinator and the work she will be doing on the retention of students. She explained that the aimhigher partnership is a Government scheme aimed at meeting their target of 50% of students into higher education.

The Widening Participation Co-ordinator identified that there were current retention problems within the School but that the reasons for this were unclear and that conclusive data needed to be obtained in order to identify problem areas. Figures for mature students at SOAS were generally 44%, compared with the national average of 20%. The retention figure for younger students showed a larger dropout rate. HEFCE benchmarks for this year were yet to be established. It was **AGREED** that a paper on retention, showing gender, ethnicity, and overseas/UK, giving numbers rather than percentages, be presented at the next meeting.

5. Curriculum

The Committee considered a report from the Curriculum Adviser, which set out the issues to be considered when looking at diversity in the curriculum. The Curriculum Adviser highlighted the importance of the policy going to the Learning & Teaching Committees before coming back to the Equality Committee.

6. **Terms of reference**

The Committee considered the revised Terms of Reference with amendments as agreed at the last meeting. It was **AGREED** to accept the revised Terms with the following amendments:

The second paragraph should be amended to read: “It is the responsibility of Executive Board to ensure that equality is taken to include age, disability, ethnicity, gender, religious belief, sexual orientation and any other area of diversity with the aim of creating a balance of representation”.

It was **AGREED** that the revised Terms of Reference would go to the Executive Board for their consideration.

7. **Equality & Diversity Policy**

The Committee considered the draft Equality & Diversity policy with amendments. It was **AGREED** to accept the revised policy.

8. **Harassment**

The Committee considered the amended, revised Policy. It was **AGREED** that the Policy would go to the Executive Board for their consideration with the following amendment:

Point 4 [Appendix E] “occur in the form of victimisation” to be replaced with “... occur in other forms such as victimisation...”.

The Diversity Adviser said that this Policy addressed cases where harassment took place between staff members and where staff harassed a student.

It was **AGREED** that the Diversity Adviser would prepare a draft policy to deal with harassment between students and where a student harassed a member of staff.

9. **Implementation of policies**

9.1 Diversity & Equality

The Diversity Adviser reported what she had done to raise awareness of Diversity and Equality issues throughout the School.

The Diversity Adviser had delivered the following awareness sessions and given information on policies currently being worked on:

- (i) Personal tutor training
- (ii) Harassment workshop for IT
- (iii) Managing diversity workshops in the library.

- (iv) Recruitment and selection training, looking at the importance of equality issues in relation to interviewing. Would be important to deliver sessions for students once policies approved.

The Academic Services Manager said that she had attended an equality workshop and had found it very useful. The HR Director also mentioned that he had received positive comments from a member of staff who had attended workshops.

9.2 Diversity training for recruitment and selection

The Committee considered that recruitment and selection, and diversity training should be mandatory and that all staff should be strongly encouraged to attend. A record should be kept of staff who had completed training and it was considered that it would be helpful for new members to complete training before serving on any of the School's Committees. For recruitment and selection interviewing, external panel members should be sent the equality guidelines.

9.3 Access to policies

Once approved, the Diversity Adviser will arrange for policies to be placed on the SOAS website, making them easily accessible for students and staff. A launch event was also planned to bring the policies to the attention of students and staff.

Members **AGREED** that it would be helpful for them to attend training sessions.

10. Nursery Provision

The Committee received an update from the Diversity Adviser. The Chinese Community Centre had been contacted but had not yet responded. An informal survey of 20 students showed that a total of 15 nursery places were required for 2004. Of the 15, 2 required part-time assistance and 3 during holiday periods. It was noted that the School had a voucher scheme for non-academic staff but no such provision for academic staff. It was **AGREED** that the Diversity Adviser would make enquiries about the scheme and report back at the next meeting.

11. Student Monitoring Data

The Academic Registrar tabled a paper which detailed the progress of students by ethnic origin. It was **AGREED** that the paper would be an item for the next meeting and a copy to be forwarded to the Widening Participation Co-ordinator.

12. Any other business

- (i) The Diversity Adviser queried the reason for not receiving more responses on the draft policies from members and asked if mechanisms were in place to consult with groups represented on the Committee. It was **AGREED** that at the next Equality Committee meeting, the way in which Committee members consult with their constituents would be an item on the agenda.
- (ii) The Chair expressed concern at the lack of student representation. It was noted that this was possibly due to the adverse weather conditions.

13. Date of next meeting

The next scheduled meeting date is Thursday 13 May 2004 at 9.00am in room 116, Russell Square.

