

SCHOOL OF ORIENTAL AND AFRICAN STUDIES

EQUALITY COMMITTEE

Thursday 23 October 2003

MINUTES

Members: Professor Elisabeth Croll (Chair)
Mrs Jan Airey
Dr Fareda Banda
Ms Antonia Bright
Dr Sonali Deraniyagala*
Mr Omar El-Kheiry
Dr Chege Githiora*
Ms Nazima Joomun
Mr Awad Joumaa
Mr Ravi Nadarajah
Dr Timon Screech

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

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

1 Membership and terms of reference

The new members, new Chair and new Diversity Adviser/Executive Secretary to the Committee were welcomed to the meeting. The Committee noted the membership and terms of reference [Appendix A].

2 Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 13 March 2003 were **APPROVED** and it was noted that the meeting scheduled for 8 May 2003 had not taken place.

3 Matters Arising

There were no matters arising not covered elsewhere on the agenda.

4 Introduction to the work of the Diversity Adviser

Karen Clarke reported that she had joined the School in the new post of Diversity Adviser on 2 June 2003. Karen had previously worked in the field of equality and diversity for six years in organisations such as the Race and

Equality Advisory Service of the Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service (ACAS) and the Department for Education.

As the School's first Diversity Adviser, Karen would be developing and implementing policies and procedures to promote equality of opportunity and ensuring effective monitoring procedures were in place. The Diversity Adviser would also be acting as the School's Community Liaison Officer and the Executive Secretary to the Equality Committee.

The following policies were already in place: Race Equality; Sexual and Racial Harassment; Recruitment and Selection; Staff Development; Work/Life Balance; Grievance; and Disciplinary. Most members of the Committee were not aware of the Recruitment and Selection Policy and the Work/Life Balance Policies and it was **AGREED** that these policies would need to be relaunched in the future.

The Diversity Adviser had drafted a new Equality and Diversity Policy (see minute 6 below) and a Harassment Policy (see minute 7 below), which would be considered by the Committee. At a later date there would be policies on Diversity in the Curriculum and Equality in the Procurement Function. The Diversity Adviser would be working on these with the Curriculum Advisor and the Purchasing Manager respectively.

The current legislation driving the equality agenda in the sector was as follows: Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000; Disability Discrimination Act – Part 4 (SENDA); Sex Discrimination Act 1975; Employment Equality (Sexual Orientation) Regulations 2003; and Employment Equality (Religion or Belief) Regulations 2003. It was **AGREED** that it would be helpful for the Committee to have copies of the relevant legislation.

5 Terms of reference

The Committee considered the draft paper [Appendix B] from the Diversity Adviser proposing revised terms of reference. It was noted that Appendix B was designed to replace the existing terms of reference (as in Appendix A). The revised terms of reference broadened the remit of the Committee to include all areas of diversity including gender, disability, etc. It was formally proposed by the Chair and **AGREED** by the Committee to accept the revised terms of reference subject to the following amendments and to submit the paper to Executive Board for approval:

In point 1 the sentence beginning 'It is the responsibility of Executive Board to ensure that all sections with nominees liaise with regard to gender, ethnicity and disability...' should give as full a list as possible, including sexual orientation. This list should be in alphabetical order and should end with 'and any other area of diversity'.

It was **AGREED** that the paper would come back to Equality Committee before being submitted to Executive Board for their consideration.

6 Equality and Diversity Policy

The Committee considered a draft Equality and Diversity Policy [Appendix C] and thanked the Diversity Adviser for providing this document for discussion. It was noted that the policy would form part of an equality booklet and would be the main document which referred to all the other policies. It was **AGREED** that the policy covered the general principles and signposted other policies but that it needed to include a clearer reference to the complaints procedures and should be amended to reflect that. It was **AGREED** that the Diversity Adviser would make the following amendments to the policy and that it would be discussed further at the next meeting of the Committee:

- (i) In point 1, *Introduction*, in the second line of the second paragraph the words 'selection of' should be deleted. The fifth bullet point should be amended as follows: 'Taking positive action as defined by the law to redress any gender or racial imbalances and other forms of discrimination in the workforce'
- (ii) Point 2, *The Legal Framework*, would need to include paragraphs on all areas of current legislation; age discrimination should be added to the final paragraph to reflect forthcoming legislation. In the third paragraph headed 'Victimisation', the sentence 'This is unlawful' should be deleted.
- (iii) In point 2.1, *Disability*, the second line in the second paragraph should be amended from 'Adjustments...' to 'Reasonable adjustments...'
- (iv) In point 3.2, *Publicising Vacancies*, the Diversity Adviser was asked to draft something additional to be considered by the School's Staffing Committee with regards to the School 'actively encouraging' applicants from certain under-represented groups and the School's 'aims to be an equal opportunities employer'. The Diversity Adviser **AGREED** to consider the point of positive action further and to come back to the Committee with suggestions at the next meeting.
- (v) In point 3.3, *Application Forms*, the final paragraph beginning 'On receipt of application forms...' should be modified to make it more precise.
- (vi) In point 8, *Student Admissions*, the words 'applications from' in the second line should be deleted and replaced with 'applicants with' and the words 'appeal to a wider applicant group through our' in the third line should be deleted and replaced with 'support'.
- (vii) It was **AGREED** that section 8 on Student Admissions would be expanded when the new Recruitment Officer is in post and the Admissions Policy is in place. It was **AGREED** that the Admissions Policy should be in place by September 2004 and that the draft should be sent to Equality Committee for consideration.

- (viii) Point 10 should include a reference to the School complying with legislative requirements. In the final paragraph the word ‘disseminate’ in the second line to be deleted and replaced with ‘measure’ and the word ‘escalate’ to be deleted and replaced with ‘disseminate’. This point would be discussed in greater detail at a future meeting as it was considered an important part of the Committee’s work.

The policy would be modified in line with the above comments and would then be sent to Executive Board for its comments. The policy would then come back to Equality Committee for further comments. It was **AGREED** that the Committee would consider it further along with all the other policies and procedures referred to.

It was noted that a common procedure for staff disciplinary and grievance situations referred to in point 5 would be available in October 2004; that the Diversity Adviser was currently working on the Equality Policy on Curriculum Issues, referred to in point 7, with the Curriculum Advisor; and the Procurement Policy referred to in point 9 would be available in due course. The Human Resources Director would be working on procedures in line with new legislation in the future and it was **AGREED** that the Committee would have some input on the revisions made. It was also **AGREED** that a Special Meeting of the Committee would be called if necessary.

Antonia Bright and Fareda Banda requested that a minimal report on widening participation initiatives be made available at the next Committee meeting. The School does not currently have a Widening Participation Officer in post so it was **AGREED** that the Student Recruitment Committee and the Dean of the Faculty of Arts & Humanities (who was currently taking academic lead responsibility for student recruitment) should be asked to submit a paper for the Committee’s consideration.

It was **AGREED** that the Human Resources Director and the Deputy Secretary would also be asked to submit a short paper on student and staff grievance procedures and how they are implemented. The Committee would propose any amendments to these if necessary.

7 Harassment Policy

The Committee considered a re-draft of the Harassment Policy [Appendix D] from the Diversity Adviser. This document had been updated and modified to refer to all forms of harassment and it would replace the School’s existing Sexual and Racial Harassment Policy. It was **AGREED** that the following amendments should be made to the policy:

- (i) Point 2, *What is Harassment?*, to be made into two separate points as follows: ‘It is important to remember that the perception of what constitutes harassment varies from one person to another’ and ‘Harassment can be evidenced by one event’.

- (ii) At point 4, *Examples of Harassment*, a further example should be inserted (j) with regards to bullying in a broader sense, ie not just based on an individual's religion or belief.
- (iii) At point 6, *The Environment*, a further sentence should be included that states: 'This does not compromise the individual's right to freedom of speech' or something similar. It was considered that point 6 could be grievance-related and that there should be a procedure to decide what is meant by the term 'offensive'. It was **AGREED** that the Diversity Adviser would have to elaborate on this and be more specific. The Diversity Adviser would also need to look at the Freedom of Speech Policy.
- (iv) At point 9, the word 'are' in the second line to be replaced by 'is'.
- (v) At point 10, 'the Personnel Manager or' should be deleted and the word 'staff' to be inserted after 'Human Resources'. The Diversity Adviser would also need to check Appendix 1 to see if the list of people was appropriate.
- (vi) At point 12, *Formal Procedure*, the third bullet point down should be amended to read 'date(s) and time(s)'. The Diversity Adviser would also need to re-word this point to show that it is not necessary to go through the informal procedure prior to the submission of a formal complaint.
- (vii) At point 16, the words '(for employees)' to be inserted after 'Pro-Director' and the words '(for students)' to be inserted after 'Deputy Secretary'. The word 'shall' in the second line to be replaced by 'will'. The Diversity Adviser also needed to refine this point after clarification with the Human Resources Director, the Deputy Secretary and the Academic Services Manager that it is in line with the School's grievance procedures.
- (viii) At point 22, the word 'genuine' to be deleted; the words 'in good faith' to be inserted after 'complaint of harassment'; and the words 'or detriment' inserted after 'victimisation'. The second sentence beginning 'Malicious complaints will be...' to be made into point 23.

It was **AGREED** that the Diversity Adviser would look further at the procedures to assess if and how they impact on any particular groups. It was also **AGREED** that the Diversity Adviser would provide a glossary of terms to go with the Harassment Policy.

The policy would be modified in line with the above comments and would then be sent to Executive Board for its comments. The policy would then come back to Equality Committee for final comments before being sent to Executive Board for approval. The Committee thanked the Diversity Adviser for her work on this and the other policies presented at the meeting today.

8 Nursery Provision

The Committee considered a report from the Diversity Adviser on nursery provision [Appendix E]. It was **AGREED** that the introduction to the report should be amended to include a reference to the School's current provision. It was noted that there had been requests in the past from the Students' Union for the School to provide its own nursery. It was **AGREED** that the School should follow up the possibility of obtaining a quota of places for students at the Peel Centre although it was noted that there had been no updates from the Director of the Peel Centre for some time. It was noted that the Committee would require an update on any further progress in due course.

9 Monitoring Update

The Committee considered a monitoring report from the Diversity Adviser [Appendix F] which gave guidelines on the importance of monitoring and how this should be done. The report also detailed the School's current position on monitoring and what kind of data will be available in the future.

The Committee received an update from the Human Resources Director on staffing statistics [Appendix G] and a tabled paper [attached] on academic grades by ethnicity for current employees and applicants. The Committee considered that how data and statistics were used was of utmost importance and agreed that any trends should be identified which showed a need for action. The Diversity Adviser **AGREED** to look at the staffing statistics to identify any trends in a qualitative way and would present a paper to the Committee at the next meeting.

It was noted that the CRE categories were used by the School but it was important that the categories used were agreed so that they were understood within the Committee. The Committee **AGREED** that members should look at what categories would be most useful so that any future data and statistics could be presented in this way. It was also **AGREED** that members would think about what data would be most useful to identify trends and this would be discussed at the next Committee meeting.

It was noted that other areas of monitoring would be looked at in the future. Committee members expressed an interest in seeing exit data for both staff and students to see what is already available and what might be needed. It was **AGREED** that the Academic Registrar, the Human Resources Director and the Curriculum Advisor would be asked to provide data and information for discussion at the next meeting. Members also asked to see statistics on staff grievances. Until now there had been no mechanisms in place to enable reporting on staff grievances and the Human Resources Director was taking advice on this. It was **AGREED** that staff grievance monitoring would be discussed again at a later date when the School's procedures had been considered. It was also **AGREED** that in the meantime the Human Resources Director should present a verbal report to the Committee at the next meeting detailing the experience of the staff grievance cases, the time scales, the outcomes and the nature of the complaints received.

10 Any other business

It was **AGREED** that a discussion on equality/diversity terms and language and how this is used and also a discussion on how the Committee operates would be of benefit to members. The Diversity Adviser would put these items on the agenda at future meetings.

11 Date of next meeting

The next scheduled meeting date is Thursday 29 January 2004 at 9.00am in room 116, Russell Square.

