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SCHOOL OF ORIENTAL AND AFRICAN STUDIES

QUALITY AUDIT AND ASSURANCE COMMITTEE

Thursday 5 October 2006

MINUTES

Members: Professor Ian Brown (Chair)
Dr Monik Charette
Ms Jo Halliday
Mr Terry Harvey
Dr Elizabeth Moore
Dr William Radice
Dr Graham Smith
Dr Charles Tripp

In attendance: Ms Jennifer Hearn (Secretary)

1 Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 8 June 2006 were **APPROVED**.

2 Matters Arising

2.1 Programme Specifications (minute 21.5)

The Committee noted that good progress had been made on completing programme specifications. With a few exceptions, which were being pursued by Faculty offices, specifications were now available via the LTU website for all undergraduate and postgraduate programmes.

3 Interim Departmental and Programme Reviews

3.1 Interim Departmental and Programme Review of the Department of Financial and Management Studies

The Committee noted that the Department of Financial and Management Studies had not yet provided the evidence and attachments referred to in its submission to IDPR, despite several requests. The Committee approved its Chair to take action in acquiring that material and in approving or otherwise the IDPR. That action would be reported to the next meeting.

3.2 Interim Departmental and Programme Review of the Language Centre

The Committee received a commentary from the Dean of Languages and Cultures [Appendix B] on the submission from the Language Centre to IDPR. The Deputy Secretary had also commented on the submission [Appendix A]. The Committee **AGREED** that, subject to the points raised in Appendices A and B, the report met the IDPR guidelines. It was reported that the Academic Registrar had met with staff of the Faculty and Language

Centre, and had agreed procedures for programme approval and external examining which would bring it in line with practice elsewhere in the School. It was agreed that the Language Centre and Faculty would be encouraged to continue these discussions, with the aim of ensuring that the planned School of Languages would participate fully in the School's quality assurance systems. Officers of QAAC would offer their support in these discussions if required, and would in any case discuss with the Language Centre how the DPR scheduled for May 2007 could best be conducted to ensure that points outstanding from the IDPR were addressed.

4 Departmental and Programme Reviews

4.1 Departmental and Programme Review of Department of Linguistics

Dr Charette withdrew for discussion of this item.

The Committee received a response from the Acting Head of the Department of Linguistics to its report of the Departmental and Programme Review carried out in February 2006 [Appendix C]. The following points were noted:

Student feedback

The Committee felt that its recommendation concerning feedback to students on comments made in course evaluations had been misunderstood. Such feedback was valuable even when it could not be made to the students concerned or even their cohort. By making discussion of student feedback a regular item at the first departmental meeting at which student representatives were present, Departments could ensure that students saw that their views had been taken into account. This was therefore recommended to the Department.

Committee members mentioned that there had been a delay in the distribution of course evaluation forms to teaching staff this summer. The LTU would be asked to ensure that results were available to teaching staff immediately after examination boards.

Extra Academic Assistants

The Committee noted the action taken by the Department to ensure that the use of EAAs, to which it did not see an alternative, did not disadvantage students.

Year abroad

The Committee expressed its concern over the agreement enabling students to spend their second year at UCLA. Arrangements had been applied inconsistently, in breach both of the School's own regulations and of the QAA's Code of Practice (Sections 6, Assessment, and 9, Placement Learning). As the agreement was between SOAS and the University of California, it was for the School to review. The Pro-Director would be asked to review the agreement, with the strong recommendation from the Committee that the arrangement not be renewed. It was noted that consideration would need to be given in to the fact that the year abroad had been advertised in undergraduate prospectuses, including 2007 entry, and both prospective students and those currently in their first year would therefore have a reasonable expectation that the opportunity would be available to them.

The Committee further received a response from the Academic Registrar to recommendation 1.3.11 [Appendix D] noting that problems with online course registration had not been within the remit of the Registry. The Secretary would contact Faculties to find out whether similar problems had been encountered this year.

It was noted that the Secretary would follow up all recommendations, including responses from the Faculty and School.

4.2 *Departmental and Programme Review of Department of Politics*

The Committee noted the minute from Resources Committee [Appendix E] in response to its report of the DPR of Politics, and welcomed the news that Heads of Departments now received briefing on the School's resource allocation model.

4.3 *Departmental and Programme Reviews 2004/05*

The Committee received one-year on reports, in response to DPRs carried out in 2004/05, from the following sections:

Careers Service [Appendix F]

The Committee wished to thank Emily Huns, the Head of Careers, for her work with Faculties and Departments, and her detailed response to DPR recommendations, which she was continuing to pursue.

Library [Appendix G]

The Committee noted that problems identified in 2004/05 reviews had in large part been addressed.

Communications [Appendix H]

The Committee noted that the statement from the Communications Manager contained considerable detail about technical developments concerning the website, but little information about the concerns raised by reviews as to the burden it placed on academic staff. The Secretary would raise this with the Communications Manager.

4.4 *Amendments to the guidelines for Departmental and Programme Review*

The Committee considered minor amendments to the guidelines for Departmental and Programme Review [Appendix I], to be implemented for reviews in 2006/07 and following. The Committee **APPROVED** the proposed amendments with the following addition:

p3 add 'at which student representatives are present' after proposed insertion.

4.5 *Departmental and Programme Reviews 2006/07*

The Committee noted the dates for Departmental and Programme Reviews 2006/07, as follows:

- Thursday 7 December 2006
Department of the Languages and Cultures of South East Asia
- Thursday 8 March 2007 Department of History
- Thursday 3 May 2007 Language Centre

It was noted that Dr Tripp had agreed to chair the DPR of History in place of Professor Brown, and that panel memberships would be circulated shortly. The Committee **APPROVED** Chair's action (delegated to Dr Tripp in the case of History) to invite a non-Committee member to join the panel for each DPR, and for the NDPR in June 2007.

5 **Non-Departmental Programme Reviews**

5.1 *Non-Departmental Programme Reviews 2006/07*

The Committee noted that the Non-Departmental Programme Review for 2006/07 would be on Thursday 7 June 2007, and would cover the following programmes, under the heading Literatures and Gender:

MA Comparative Literature (Africa/Asia)
MA East Asian Literature
MA Gender Studies

5.2 *Non-Departmental Programme Review panel*

The Secretary would circulate membership of the NDPR panel shortly. As for DPRs, the Chair would invite a non-Committee member to join the panel.

5.3 *Guidelines for Non-Departmental Programme Review*

The Committee **APPROVED** minor amendments to the guidelines for Non-Departmental and Programme Review [Appendix L], to be implemented for reviews in 2006/07 and following.

6 QAA Special review of Research Degree Programmes

6.1 *QAA review report*

The Committee noted the QAA's final report on its special review of research degree programmes [Appendix M].

6.2 *Action following review*

The Committee noted that the working group convened to draft the School's submission to special review had met to discuss the review report and its recommendations, and would report to Learning and Teaching Policy Committee in November on action taken.

7 QAA Institutional Audit

The Committee noted that officers had met with the QAA Assistant Director responsible for the School's Institutional Audit. The Committee received Version 2 of the School's Institutional Briefing Paper (V2 IBP). The following sections drew particular discussion:

External examiners

It was agreed that the current wording did not fully reflect the serious rigour with which the School implemented its procedures for external examining. It was suggested that it would be more appropriate to say that Visiting Examiners 'oversee' the setting of examination papers rather than 'participate' in it.

Programme approval

It was noted that the School had been slow to respond to recommendations concerning the programme approval process following the 2003 Institutional Audit. Action had now been taken and the Deputy Secretary was asked to ensure that the Briefing Paper reflected both the reasons for delay and the more satisfactory current position.

Other modes of study

The Committee heard that the Secretary had, since circulating V2 IBP, received further information from IFCELS, which would be included. The Committee noted that more information could also be included on the Language Centre, the Research Centre and the Centre for Excellence in Learning and Teaching.

Research-led teaching

The Chair would draft a paragraph on the ways in which research fed into the School's teaching, and would circulate it to Committee members for comment. Examples from their own practice would be welcomed.

8 Annual Report to Academic Board

The Committee received the Chair's annual report to Academic Board. One amendment was proposed; that a sentence be added to the paragraph on student feedback to reflect minute 4.1 above. Subject to this amendment, the report was **APPROVED**.

It was agreed that as the report contained information on recurrent findings from DPR which required action by the School, Academic Board would be asked to ensure that the report was discussed and not only noted.

9 Review of Subject Benchmark Statements

The Committee heard that revised Subject Benchmark Statements had been circulated by the QAA for discussion. The Secretary had forwarded these to the Departments concerned, and was collecting responses, which would be collated and returned to the QAA.

10 Any other business

Departmental and Programme Review of Development Studies

The Secretary tabled a response to the DPR of Development Studies, received from the Head of Department after papers had been circulated. The Committee thanked the Department and approved the response.

11 Date of next meeting

The next business meeting would be held on 25 January 2007.