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SOAS

Human Resources Committee

9.00am on Thursday 25 October 2007 in room 116

Minutes

Ms Sharon Page, Registrar & Secretary, (Chair)
Mr Peter Mitchell, HR Director, (Secretary)
Professor Matthew Craven, Dean of Faculty
Mr John Harmer*, Computer Network Manager
Dr Jane Harrigan, Head of Department & Reader in Economics
Dr Rachel Harris, Lecturer in Ethnomusicology
Dr Bengisu Rona, Senior Lecturer in Arabic Literature
Dr Desmond Thomas, Research Student Adviser
Ms Deb Viney, Diversity Adviser
Ms Emily Crofts, HR Manager (in attendance).

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

1. Terms of Reference

Human Resources Committee **noted** the terms of reference at Appendix A.

2. Annex XIV - Conduct of Meetings

Human Resources Committee **noted** the procedure for the conduct of meetings at Appendix B.

3. Matters Arising

(i) Staff Survey

The HR Director gave an oral report on the outcome of the recent Staff Survey, which had been carried out by Capita (previously NHS Partners). The results of the Survey are available on the Human Resources Department intranet pages. The Survey has provided benchmark data to allow the School to compare its results with those of other Higher Education Institutions. The HR Director emphasised the importance of the Staff Survey in the development of the Human Resources Strategy. The results of the survey had been discussed with Executive Board and Heads of Departments, with a number of outcomes from these are discussions being fed into the development of the HR Strategy.

The Chair of Human Resources Committee encouraged Committee members to read the Survey results in order to inform their work on the Committee.

The Diversity Adviser asked if it was possible to analyse the harassment data to identify any trends or issues in certain groups of staff. The HR Director confirmed that it should be possible to carry out this type of analysis.

(ii) Human Resources Update

The HR Director gave an oral report updating the Committee on the work of the Human Resources Department.

The HR Director stated that agreement had been reached with the School's trade unions on a method of translating Part-time Hourly Paid Teachers onto Other-Related fractional contracts. A training scheme for Graduate Teaching Assistants was still being developed.

There were a number of vacancies in the Human Resources Department, one of which would not be filled until 2008.

As part of its Information Systems project, the Human Resources Department is currently investigating the possibility of introducing an online recruitment system, and to review current Recruitment Policy and Procedures.

(iii) Framework Agreement

The HR Director gave an oral update on progress in implementing the national Framework Agreement. A large number of Steering Group meetings have been scheduled with union colleagues to reach agreement on outstanding issues of negotiation. Pay modelling was currently being carried out to develop a new grading structure and this process is identifying any posts which will be 'red circled' or 'green circled' following implementation.

4. HR Strategy

The Chair explained that the draft HR Strategy is one of eight sub-strategies currently being developed to implement the School's Vision and Strategy for the Centennial. An early draft of the HR Strategy had been through the School Committee structure in Spring 2007 and agreed by Governing Body in June 2007, with the proviso that a detailed action plan be drawn up. Executive Board are scheduled to consider the revised HR Strategy on 12 November 2007, and will recommend it to Resources and Planning Committee. Resources and Planning Committee are due to consider the HR Strategy on 20 November and will recommend it to Governing Body for approval on 14 December 2007.

The HR Director stated that HEFCE's Self Assessment Tool has been used to develop the HR Strategy, as the HR Department will have to use this Tool to report to HEFCE in May 2008 in order to ensure that previous Rewarding and Developing Staff funding is maintained.

The Chair asked the Committee members for their comments on the draft HR Strategy.

The need for staff development management training was discussed at length by the Committee. The Research Student Adviser stated that the School does not have an Academic Support Manager unlike most other Higher Education

Institutions. The Senior Lecturer in Arabic Literature suggested that alternative methods to email should be used to promote staff development events. She also stated that the given the short duration of appointments for Heads of Departments it was difficult to get the individual post-holders to invest their time in training. The Head of the Economics Department stated that she felt that there was a lack of incentive for staff to become Heads of Academic Departments. The Chair stated that issues of reward and role clarity need to be addressed for Heads of Academic Department.

The proposed 'Golden Hello' Policy (Appendix 3, Action Plan 2 (iii)), was discussed and whilst the usefulness of Golden Hellos in attracting staff for reasons such as the RAE was noted, the need for a clear policy was emphasised.

The importance of Developing a Communication Strategy (Appendix 3, Action Plan 5 (i)) was also discussed and noted.

The Head of the Economics Department asked if target date for appraisal scheme (Appendix 3, Action Plan 7 (ii)) was too late and asked if peer observation would be included in the scheme. The HR Director explained that union consultation on the new Appraisal Policy need to be carried out, and managers and staff trained in its operation before the scheme could be implemented. It may be possible to include peer observation in the Appraisal scheme in the future, subject to union consultation.

The staff development sections of the HR Strategy were considered and the HR Director emphasised the need for greater investment and resource in staff development, including support and management development for academic staff

The statistics accompanying the HR Strategy in Appendix 3 were also briefly discussed. The Senior Lecturer in Arabic Literature asked if the information on Senior Lecturers and Readers could be separated out. The HR Director explained that Senior Lecturers and Readers are appointed on the same grade, which is why these groups have been combined in the statistics. The Diversity Adviser requested other benchmark data from other universities. The turnover figures were discussed and the HR Director stated that the School's turnover figures were relatively low; however, the Staff Survey indicated that a relatively large number of staff are considering leaving employment at SOAS.

The members of the Committee were asked to email their comments on the HR Strategy to the HR Director. Subject to any amendments to the HR Strategy resulting from such comments, on behalf of HR Committee, the Chair agreed to **recommend** the HR Strategy to Executive Board for consideration on 12 November 2007.

No reserved business was considered at this meeting.