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SOAS

Human Resources Committee

9.00am on Thursday 1 May 2008 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 Zoe Weaver, External Adviser
Ms Emily Crofts*, HR Manager (in attendance).
Ms Serena Yeo, Staff Development Manager (in attendance)

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

8. Minutes of the Meeting of 14th February 2008

It was **noted** that the final sentence of the fifth paragraph on minute 6 (i) should read:

“It was **agreed** that a working group of consisting of, for example, an Academic Head of Department, a Head of Administration and HR staff should be set up to help identify management development requirements (ACTION: Peter Mitchell/Serena Yeo).”

Subject to this amendment, minutes were approved.

9. Matters Arising

HR Strategy Status Report

The HR Director talked the committee through the update paper previously circulated.

Pay Framework: It was **noted** that although local agreement had been reached with the unions, there had been problems with the regional ratification processes, first with UCU and more recently with UNISON. This meant that there was likely to be a delay in the process of sending out letters and getting staff paid on the new pay scales.

If no agreement was reached by this Friday at the latest, it would mean that staff would not be able to be paid until July, rather than June as previously agreed. It was further **noted** that an all-staff e-mail about this would be circulated before the end of the week.

The External Adviser asked about the red circle roles and what was being done, particularly in respect of communication, about these people. It was **noted** that there were a relatively small number of staff affected and that this was as a result of strenuous efforts, along with line managers, to get as many of the red circles as possible resolved and the posts back into grade in advance of the scores and results being released. It was further **noted** that line managers were going to be informed of the outcome of the exercise for staff in their areas at the same time as staff being sent individual letters about the outcome for them and their roles.

Hourly-paid teaching staff proposals: It was **reported** that there was still significant work to be carried out in order to implement the agreed proposals. It was **noted** that since the last HR Committee meeting, information about numbers of staff and fractions had been received by HR back from the Faculties and this information had been provided to the unions for comment and agreement. The initial feedback from the unions had not, however, been encouraging and it is clear that further work needs to be undertaken before final agreement can be reached.

It was further **reported** that, in addition to the Faculties, there were very significant issues still to be resolved in the Language Centre and IFCELS.

For the latter, it was **noted** that meetings had taken place between HR, IFCELS management and the unions to try and reach agreement. It was **noted** that agreement in principle had been reached to implement the same basic proposals (in respect of the multiplier etc) within IFCELS as for the Faculties, but that further consultation with IFCELS staff was required to address affordability issues. This would involve further discussions about working practices.

For the Language Centre, it was **noted** that all parties recognised the very considerable financial difficulties being faced, not just in respect of the move onto fractional contracts, but also in respect of the impact of the HERA evaluation process, with Teaching only staff being the largest group of Green Circle roles. It was further **noted** that Finance, in the absence of reliable data from Language Centre itself, had estimated a c£500k shortfall in finances as a result of the move to permanent fractional contracts and the HERA impact.

The next step would be to arrange further meetings between the Faculties, HR and the unions to try and agree the fractional contracts in all areas, although it was **noted** that reaching agreement, particularly in the Language Centre, would be extremely difficult (ACTION: HR).

The Registrar and Secretary reminded the Committee that the School was one of the highest in the sector in respect of percentage of income spent of staff salaries (64%).

It was **noted** that the strategy of the School going forward was to increase income, rather than reduce staff expenditure, but this strategy was being threatened by the large increases in staff costs highlighted above, that are SOAS specific, coupled with a large general salary increase for the sector of at least 4% due in October this year.

HR Policies and Procedures: It was **reported** that progress in this area had been a little disappointing, mainly due to the huge amount of time and effort being devoted to the Pay Framework implementation. It was **noted** that priorities going forward are Appraisal (where comments have been received back from the Pro-Director and the Deans, after the paperwork was circulated to Executive Board) and the Sickness Absence Policy. It was **noted** that these policies, along with a number of others, would be discussed further with the unions at meetings to be set up with HR, following final agreement of the pay framework (ACTION: HR).

HR Systems and Processes: It was **reported** that work is still on-going in respect of getting the HR filing system DPA compliant, but that progress is being made. It was further **reported** that the new Doc Link system has gone live and information about the new procedures had been sent out to staff. It was **noted** that Web-based recruitment solutions were still being evaluated, but that this project would enable a significant amount of HR administrative time to be saved. It may also have knock-on benefits for line managers, with the possible capability of on-line short listing, and possible savings against recruitment advertising expenditure.

Staff Development: The Staff Development Manager **reported** that progress was being made on the staff development aspects of the HR strategy, with a particular emphasis on Management Development, with a first draft proposal paper produced. It was **noted** that there was an increased emphasis on improved information for managers and a demonstration of a web-based product (Management Know How materials) had been arranged, which might eventually form the basis of a SOAS Managers Handbook.

The External Adviser asked about the compulsory training identified as part of the HR Strategy. It was **noted** that this was starting to happen at senior level (with Executive Board having agreed to undertake Recruitment and Selection and Equality and Diversity training), but that there were still issues relating to the identification of the compulsory elements of training required at different levels and the availability of staff to undertake this training. It was, however, recognised that some aspects of training should necessarily be compulsory, as the School would be quite exposed without such training being in place (e.g. Health and Safety for example).

Finally, it was **reported** that the three additional posts identified in the HR Strategy to help to deliver the actions relating to the strategy had not been approved by Executive Board. It was **noted** that this was likely to affect delivery against a number of the actions contained within the HR Strategy and that this would have to form a part of the annual report on progress to Resources and Planning Committee. It was further **agreed** that this report would be produced and circulated to the committee members for comment (ACTION: Peter Mitchell).

10. HEFCE Self Assessment Tool (SAT)

It was **noted** that the School was required to make a return to HEFCE by the end of May 2008 in order to retain around £198,000 worth of funding. Although this was not thought to be particularly onerous, it was important that consideration be given to each of the SAT headings and that, in particular, an external view of progress under each of the headings should be a part of the process. It was **further noted** that the HR Strategy had been put together deliberately under each of the SAT headings in order to facilitate this return. Finally, it was **noted** that Zoe Weaver, as external adviser to the Committee and as a member of the School Governing Body, had agreed to provide this external assessment as part of the process.

It was **agreed** that a return to HEFCE be made by the required deadline, to incorporate a brief report comprising details of progress under each of the SAT/HR Strategy heading together with an external view of progress (ACTION: Peter Mitchell/Zoe Weaver).

11. Any Other Business

None

No reserved business was considered at this meeting.