School of Oriental and African Studies
Faculty of Law and Social Sciences
Faculty Learning and Teaching Committee

Thursday 11th October, 2007
Held in Room 116 at 9.00am

MINUTES

Members:
Ms Sonja Ruehl   Associate Dean – Learning and Teaching (Chair)
Dr Jens Lerche   Development Studies Department representative
Dr Helen Macnaughtan  Financial and Management Studies Department representative
Dr Dic Lo*   Economics Department representative
Mr Nick Foster*   The School of Law representative
Dr Matthew Nelson  Politics Department representative
Mr George Sanders  Undergraduate student representative

In Attendance:
Mr Nicholas Page   Deputy Registrar
Mrs Barbara Spina  LSS Faculty Librarian
Ms Emily Huns   Head of College Careers Service
Dr Mandy Bentham  Head of Learning and Teaching Strategy
Mr Luke Dillon   Committee Secretary

*= not present – apologies received

1. Minutes of the Last Meeting:
The minutes of the last meeting, held on 24th May 2007 were APPROVED.

1.1 It was NOTED regarding item 62 of the previous minutes that the proposal from the Faculty of Arts and Humanities be rejected as being an inappropriately mechanistic approach. The Faculty Board of Law and Social Sciences recommended the CISD approach for use across this Faculty.

2. Matters Arising:
It was NOTED that the FLTC wanted to raise the issue of plagiarism again with LTU regarding the proposed plagiarism detection software that LTU had piloted but found deficient. The database of Turnitin is thought to have been considerably expanded in the last 2 years. Other institutions have anti-plagiarism software in place but SOAS does not. A key issue is not just to identify cases of plagiarism but to raise cross-cultural awareness e.g. text book dependence.

3. Terms of Reference:
It was NOTED that a change had been made to section 3d of the Terms of Reference (Appendix A) because in the new Committee Structure, the LTQC replaces the LTPC.

3.1 It was NOTED that in paragraph 2 Faculty Librarian had been wrongly spelt as ‘Faulty Librarian’. The Committee apologized to the Librarian.

4. Careers Services:
The Annual Report for Careers Services was NOTED (Appendix B). Ms Emily Huns the Head of College Careers Service spoke on the Annual Report. Ms Huns highlighted the main achievements listed on the Executive Summary, including that the graduate labour market was positive, with higher starting salaries. Ms Huns raised the issue that home domiciled students need to engage more with Careers. There had also been a good response to the Events Programme of over 50%. It was NOTED that there needs to be wider engagement with more alumni. There had been good support from the Development Office. There had been a good
demand from traditional employers and recruitment fairs. Over 300 students had shown interest in working for the Volunteering Unit, though only 100 would be required. Ms Huns is building up a good set of case studies of individual graduates from different Departments across the School, outlining their subsequent career paths.

4.1 The Associate Dean asked if the Alumni collection of case studies could be expanded. Ms Huns confirmed that it could and invited colleagues to send her names and contact details of suitable alumni for further case studies. (eh12@soas.ac.uk)

4.2 It was NOTED that the number of Fora for LASS could be expanded. Suggestions included a Political Research Forum and an NGO Forum.

4.3 Dr Jens Lerche NOTED that Alumni software (Raisers' Edge) was of very poor quality. Ms Huns will contact the Development Office to liaise with the Development Studies department during reading week.

4.4 The Committee congratulated the Careers Service on a very good period of consolidation and progress.

5. Library Matters:
The Library Report (Appendix C) was NOTED by FLTC. It was NOTED that the Library’s opening hours had been extended. The Library would now be open on Sundays (11.00-18.00), reference only and would also be open until 11pm during the exam period. There would be extended hours during the summer period. The Special Collection Reading Room, closed over the Summer, had been enlarged. The SOAS Archive catalogue was now available online.

5.1 The Committee welcomed these developments.

6. Associate Dean’s Report:
The Associate Dean commented on the QAA Institutional Audit Report and Action Plan. The QAA Audit was available in hardback and on the internet. The Action Plan, which involves SOAS clarification of QA mechanisms and responsibilities in response to the Audit Report recommendations, will be presented to Academic Board on 31 October. It was AGREED that the Action Plan, being of relevance to this Committee, would be circulated to committee members.

6.1 The Associate Dean alerted members that one of the QAA recommendations is the proposed introduction of peer observation of teaching across the School. It is already done in Languages and Cultures and was agreed in principle in 2003. Staff Development has produced a paper on POT introduction which is under discussion with UCU.

6.2 The Associate Dean gave an update regarding admissions tutors. Admissions tutors would now have more power to admit ‘non-standard’ applicants, where there is for example additional professional experience to compensate for a degree result which does not match the formal admissions criterion of a UK Honours degree with a 2.1 classification or better. Admissions tutors can still refer to Admissions or to the Associate Dean for further advice regarding applications, if they wish. Admissions intend that PG applications will no longer be forwarded to tutors via the Faculty Office. Admissions tutors are to have a space set aside for them to process applications in the Admissions Office instead. Training sessions for Admissions Tutors on the new system will be run shortly.

6.3 It was NOTED by the FLTC that the committee does not agree with the proposed streamlining of the FLTC Committees to create a cross-faculty committee to deal with course proposals. It was agreed by the FLTC that any weakening of the LSS FLTC would be considered a retrograde step.

7. National Student Survey:
The Committee raised the question of the timetable and recent timetable clashes, with the head of the LTU who was in attendance. Dr Mandy Bentham explained that there had been a significant number of problems with IT systems especially with Blackboard (there had been a bug in the system and the licensing company had put in place a temporary quick fix). Additional delays had
been caused by staff changes within the LTU team. It was NOTED that there was an issue of quickly identifying student numbers, which impacted on the number and size of rooms required. It was NOTED that Dr Bentham and Mr Nick Butler from Recruitment will need to develop a system to better predict student numbers.

7.1 It was NOTED that SOAS student numbers had reached full capacity. All class rooms were full, with no scope for best fit. It was NOTED that there was no capacity to admit additional students.

7.2 It was NOTED by FLTC that the main concern of students lay with timetables and not with Blackboard. There was an unresolved issue regarding preferential times for specific courses.

7.3 Dr Bentham PROPOSED that a Timetable Report be written for the next FLTC meeting.

7.4 The FLTC AGREED that there should be a central person in each department to oversee timetable allocations.

7.5 The National Students Survey (Appendix D) was NOTED by FLTC. Dr Bentham spoke on the survey, stating that it had now run for three years. The response rate was down this year and measures are being taken to investigate that decline. The SEC 2007 in-house survey had been redesigned to follow the NSS format for ease of comparison. The Committee noted that, whereas Library resources used to be highlighted as students' main concern, these now related instead to workload and to support and advice received from academics and from Faculty Office. The introduction of ‘open response’ areas for students to explain their responses, should help to differentiate academic and administrative support issues better in future.

7.6 It was NOTED that only the Student Course Evaluation Results for LASS were made available for consideration during the FLTC meeting. The electronic version of Appendix D contained the results for all of the faculties.

7.7 It was NOTED that it would be useful to have termly as well as annual data due to staff changes each term in some Departments' teaching arrangements.

7.8 It was NOTED that Table 2, Section 8 of Appendix D indicated that students were not happy with the level of support and service provided by the Student Support Team. The Associate Dean commented that the Faculty Office was currently understaffed and that discussions were beginning on increasing staffing levels, given the large student numbers in this Faculty.

7.9 The Associate Dean asked Dr Bentham whether the student survey could be completed online. Dr Bentham replied that this has already been recommended. It was also NOTED that online submission would facilitate a more detailed narrative assessment.

8. Changes to Course Weightings and Submission of Deadlines:
The Changes to Course Weightings and Submission Deadlines (Appendix E) was NOTED by the FLTC. It was NOTED that this was an area criticized by QAA. It was NOTED that this year’s essay deadlines had not been input onto UNIT-E because some Departments, including the School of Law, have not yet confirmed its essay deadlines. Colleagues were reminded that course proposals include assignment deadlines, though these may need to be ‘tweaked’ for the coming year.

8.1 Concern was raised by the FLTC regarding how course proposals are filed. It was deemed important that all course proposals be easily accessible.

8.2 It was NOTED that once a course has commenced, the actual forms of assessment and examination should not be changed for the current year. A change such as in the relative weighting of assessed elements, could only be done for 2007-8 if the written consent of all students were to be obtained. If not then students had a right to be assessed and examined under the old system.
9. **Course Amendments:**

Course amendments considered by FLTC and **APPROVAL RECOMMENDED to FACULTY BOARD** for the following course amendments:

a. 15PANC999  PG – Justice, reconciliation and Reconstruction in Post-Conflict Societies  (Appendix F)
b. 15PPOC013  PG – Comparative Politics of the Middle East  (Appendix G)

10. **Chair’s Action Taken for New Courses:**

Chair’s Action taken and **APPROVAL RECOMMENDED to FACULTY BOARD** for the following courses:

a. 15PDSH021  PG – HIV, Aids and Development  (Appendix H)
b. 15PDSH019  PG – Problems of Development in the Middle East North Africa  (Appendix I)
c. 15PDSH020  PG – Security  (Appendix J)
d. 15PLAC150  PG – Human Rights and Islamic Law  (Appendix K)
e. 15PLAC149  PG – International Law and Global Orders  (Appendix L)
f. 15PLAC155  PG – Law of International Finance  (Appendix M)

11. **Chair’s Action Taken for Course Amendments:**

Chair’s Action taken and **APPROVAL RECOMMENDED to FACULTY BOARD** for the following course amendments:

a. 154800023  UG – Introduction to Global Forced Migration  (Appendix N)
b. 15PANC999  PG – International Comparative and Corporate Law  (Appendix O)

12. **Any Other Business:**

Dr Matthew Nelson raised the issue of the number of weeks that Teaching Assistants (TA’s) are contracted to teach being reduced from 22 weeks to 19. The Associate Dean confirmed that HR is responsible for the contracts. The AD suggested that the reduction could perhaps be due to TA’s not being responsible for revision weeks. NOTE: This was subsequently confirmed as the reason, but the Faculty Administrator explained that the change was in the way hourly contracts are currently being interpreted and not part of HRs negotiation of new fractional employment contracts. Queries should be directed to HODs or to the Academic Support Office.