

SCHOOL OF ORIENTAL AND AFRICAN STUDIES

Resources & Planning Committee

AGENDA

**Tuesday 10 March 2015 at 2.30 pm
in Room 116**

- | | | |
|-------------|---|--------------|
| I | Minutes
To approve: the minutes of the meeting held on Tuesday 11 November 2014 | Attached |
| II | Action Taken
To receive: updates on action taken | |
| III | Matters Arising / for Report | |
| IV | Director's Report
To receive: a report from the Director | [Appendix A] |
| V | Finance
To receive: the forecast financial out-turn 2014/15 | [Appendix B] |
| VI | Sustainability
To consider: the action plan in the context of ensuring the long-term academic and financial sustainability of the School | [Appendix C] |
| VII | Accelerated Investment Fund
To note: a report from the Head of the Portfolio Management Office regarding the resource requirements of the current portfolio of programmes | [Appendix D] |
| VIII | Research Leave
To note: a report from the Pro-Director (Research & Enterprise) regarding proposed updates to SOAS-funded research leave | [Appendix E] |
| IX | Students' Union Non-Educational Priorities 2014-2015
To receive: a report from the Students' Union Co-President (Welfare and Campaigns) on the Students' Union Non-Educational Priorities 2014-15 | [Appendix F] |
| X | HEFCE
To consider: the test for reasonableness applied in the preparation of the School's TRAC return for 2014 | [Appendix G] |
| XI | Planning
To note: a revised planning template and report on the faculty planning process for 2015 | [Appendix H] |

XII Investment Advisory Panel

To receive: the minutes of the meeting of the Investment
Advisory Panel held on 11 November 2014

[Appendix I]*

XIII Cash Position

To receive: reports on:

- (i) Cash flow
- (ii) Capital and Debt Statement
- (iii) Short Term Deposits

[Appendix J (i & ii)]*

[Appendix K]*

[Appendix L (i & ii)]*

XIV Date of Next Meeting

To note: that the next meeting will be on Tuesday 08
June 2015 at 14:30 in room 116

*Items marked with an asterisk are formal business, not intended for discussion.

SCHOOL OF ORIENTAL AND AFRICAN STUDIES

RESOURCES AND PLANNING COMMITTEE

DRAFT MINUTES OF MEETING

Tuesday 10 March 2015 at 2:30 pm
in Room 116, College Buildings

Mr G Dalal, Chair (Hon.Treasurer)
Ms S Alier (Chair, Estates & Infrastructure Committee)*
Professor R Black (Pro-Director, Research & Enterprise)
Ms L Gibbs (Registrar)
Sir Martin Harris (Vice-Chair of Governing Body)
Dr T Miller (Chair of Governing Body)
Professor N Rao (Pro-Director, Learning & Teaching)
Professor P Webley (Director)
Sir Graham Fry
Dr L Hammond
Mr J Heskett*
Professor C Oughton
Ms G Robertson
Mr D Skinner*
Mr N Uddin

In attendance: Mr G Appleby (Director of Finance and Planning)
Professor M Craven (Dean of Faculty of Law & Social Sciences)
Professor G Singh (Dean of Faculty of Arts & Humanities)
Professor A Pauwels (Dean of Faculty of Languages and Cultures)*
Dr C Ince (Head of Secretariat)
Ms A Hartrey (secretary)*
Ms A Perez de Vera (minute secretary)

* Those persons marked with an asterisk were unable to be present.

22. Minutes

The minutes of Resources & Planning Committee meeting held on Tuesday 11 November 2014 were approved.

23. Action Taken

It was noted that minuted item 14 would be addressed at this meeting of RPC.
Minuted items 17(i)-(v) and 19 are addressed under Matters arising.

24. Matters arising/for report

Following advice from the Secretariat, it was noted that re-submitting the sub-committee reports to RPC was unnecessary as RPC was not required to make a decision based on the reports. However, it was noted that the clarity of the reports could be improved. The committee agreed that use of a pro-forma similar to that used for the Portfolio Reports be adopted for future sub-committee reports.

An aural report was received on the progress of the Fossil Fuel Industries Divestment committee. The committee includes student and staff representatives from RPC and is receiving secretariat support. They had met and were being assisted by Newtons in better understanding the definition of which industries were considered Oil and Gas (coal industries being more straightforward to identify). A final report is due to Governing Body by the end of April and will be available for note at the next (June) RPC meeting.

25. Director's Report

A report was received from the Director at Appendix A.

A further update on the London Weighting was given, noting that the negotiations were in their closing stages with the School having submitted its final offer. The committee noted that the anticipated cost of £1.3m had been included in the forecast to account for the increase. A further comment on the Master plan for the University of London included a reiteration of the benefits of the University of London being viewed as a whole entity, particularly for facilitating our relationship with the Borough of Camden with capital works. It was also noted that City University was in the process of joining the University of London (subject to approval by Senate and Council), and that a recent vote of their students on the decision to join received a 89.5% approval rating. This shows the strength of the brand for the University of London and reinforces the value to us in being part of it.

26. Financial Reporting 2014/15 Out-turn

A report was received from the Director of Finance and Planning at Appendix B.

The Committee noted that the 2014-15 forecast outturn shows a surplus of £250k, which is an improvement of £920k on last year's budget before taking account of the projected £900k cost of voluntary severance (VS). While a surplus is an improvement, it is still £3.9m below the School's target of achieving 5% surplus of income.

Key factors contributing to this outcome included lower than expected tuition fees in IFCELS, which was offset by increases in operating income and salary costs (vacancy savings and a review and update of the staffing budget post-November). Further reductions in utility costs and other underspends also contributed to the improved result. The committee noted that the VS estimated around 20 staff to comprise the cost of £900k, and that the salary forecast includes provision for the year one increase in the London allowance (£290k).

The chair invited the Pro-Director (Learning and Teaching) to provide a verbal report on the performance of IFCELS. The committee noted that a severe impediment for students on the pathway from UG to PG was the need for a different Visa if studying for more than one term. The following three strategies have been put in place, or are about to be initiated to improve conversion rates:

1. Guaranteed Conditional Offers from all Departments for students enrolling in Masters level programmes. This has already seen an increase of 66% in applications for pre-Masters and 18% for Foundation.
2. Piloting the abolition of the Application Fee (£90)
3. Offering scholarships of £2000

It was noted that there had been some success on improving the original 21% progression in to SOAS programmes up to 68% and that IFCELS still managed to reach their target of 25% profit of income, but lost money on overheads. There was considerable discussion about the roles of IFCELS and the Language Centre, as well as the role of Distance Learning. The committee noted that the current Track A option and servicing from the University of London was considered acceptable for our needs.

27. Sustainability

A presentation was given and report received from the Registrar and Director of Finance and Planning at Appendix C for the Committee to consider.

It was noted that after six years of substantial student growth, including establishing new programmes, the School had established its independence, and in acquiring the lease of

Senate House North Block will successfully move to a single campus in 2016. But the situation moving forward is not so clear, particularly after missing student targets in 2014 and a disappointing result in the 2014 REF results, which further impacts SOAS' performance in several League Tables and consequently its ability to recruit students on this strength.

Three options were discussed by the committee:

- Increasing income through student enrolments
- Increasing income through student fees
- Decreasing costs

It was acknowledged that the REF results would impact PGT enrolments mostly. The committee discussed at length how realistic the student growth percentages were, particularly for PGT which was recommended to be reduced to only 14% of past targets for existing programmes, and 75% of new programme targets (a growth of 186 over the next three years). To counter this, UG growth would be higher at 22%, but this was still pegged back a quarter from original targets, with most growth on new programmes rather than existing ones (an additional 202 over three years).

There was little scope for increasing fees or reducing non-salary costs as these options have been extended as much as possible to date.

While noting the decision already made to launch a voluntary severance (VS) scheme to reduce staff costs in the medium term, without further changes this change alone risks added stress on remaining staff and a downward spiral of morale. Taken into account with other problems that have manifested over the last five years, such as duplication and overlap of courses and programmes, significant student staff ratio (SSR) differences between Departments, and other criticisms raised by QAA about the operation and co-operation of Departments and Faculties, there is a need to address academic structures, including management of performance, workload, and curriculum, in the School's response.

There was considerable discussion on the effectiveness of the VS as a strategy and the likelihood of achieving the number of volunteers required for significant savings. It was acknowledged that wider changes, such as developing training support for Head of Departments, addressing issues in support services (such as through the diverse projects in the Portfolio Board), ensuring an uplift in research performance, and reviewing curriculum across all three faculties would be needed to contribute to the solution.

Other options explored by the committee included the possibility of drawing down on reserves to accelerate the changes if necessary, and expanding the distance learning options offered by the School.

The committee discussed the timing of the proposed changes and the need to begin quickly to ensure changes are captured in the 2016/17 academic year, although many goals had a longer-term frame. The current urgency was also necessary to ensure management decisions had time to flow through the proper governance pathways. It was further noted that to ensure success, a holistic approach was needed where strategies overlap, such as dovetailing curriculum changes with research leave incentives.

28. Accelerated Investment Fund

The Committee received an oral report from the Secretary on behalf of the Head of the Portfolio Management Office regarding the resource requirements of the current portfolio of programmes at Appendix D. The paper summarises projects within each

program of Student, Staff, and IT areas and includes in Annex D the funding approved and pending.

The committee appreciated the new format of reporting. It was noted that on the whole all projects are on track and within funding, with only Student Attendance Monitoring currently on hold. The challenge here has been more around IT capacity and the difficulty to recruit into these roles. Similarly, WebFirst has been delayed 6 months while fixing the IT infrastructure, with the result that a new proposal for the internal component of the project is to go to the Portfolio Board shortly. There are also some dependencies for the Enhancing Resourcelink project on changes to the Chart of Accounts, but it is hoped that this project will help managers manage better. The committee discussed the role of research management and projects and were informed that there were plans for a bigger research project on the horizon that the project in start-up would contribute to.

29. Research Leave

The committee was asked to note a report at Appendix E presented by the Pro-Director (Research) that outlined a set of principles for School-funded research leave to be developed into policy and implemented in 2016/17.

It was noted that a similar proposal had been rejected several years ago on the grounds of cost. This proposal, however, has been structured to ensure it remains cost neutral for Departments and the School. It also draws on a comparator analysis with other HEIs to recommend increasing the frequency that staff can apply for leave, but under stricter circumstances. It is also proposed that Departments manage the absence and its impact on their curriculum, as well as monitor more closely the outcomes from the leave.

The committee discussed several aspects of the proposal, in particular, the operational success and discipline required in enforcing the proposed cut to fractional appointments.

30. Students' Union Non-Educational Priorities 2014-2015

The Committee received a report from the student representative at Appendix F outlining an earlier paper with the Students' Union non-educational priorities. It was noted that many of these projects have since been initiated or have addressed the issues raised.

Still outstanding, and for which a forthcoming paper is expected, is the issue of the School acting as Guarantor for International students with regard to accommodation needs. Further discussion at Executive Board is also planned on the issue of free graduations for the graduand.

31. HEFCE

The committee considered the test for reasonableness applied in the preparation for the School's TRAC return for 2014 at Appendix G.

It was noted that the entire School was surveyed this year and the only significant change from previous years was an increase in research time. The committee agreed with the analysis presented.

32. Planning

The Committee noted the revised planning template and calendar for this year's Faculty Planning cycle at Appendix H.

One of the changes in line with the School's Sustainability strategy was a move to more rigorous Departmental Planning, including a pilot of three or four Departments this year. However, only the Faculty Plans would be presented to RPC at its October meeting.

33. Investment Advisory Panel

The Committee noted the minutes of the meeting of the Investment Advisory Panel held on 11 November 2014 at Appendix I. There was a brief discussion of the more recent meeting of the panel, in particular on the outcomes that delivered better than expected returns.

34. Cash Position

The Committee noted the reports on Cash flow, the Capital and Debt Statement, and Short Term Deposits.

35. Student Experience Committee

The Committee noted the minutes of the meeting of the Student Experience Committee held on 29 January 2015.

There was brief discussion on the issue of increased reporting of students with mental health issues and whether the School was providing adequate support. The committee noted that the School was not in a position to contribute unlimited funds to resolve this and that better embedded structures and prioritising against limited funds would be further pursued as solutions.

36. Date of next meeting

The next meeting of the Resources & Planning Committee is scheduled for:

Tuesday 9 June 2015

All meetings are scheduled for 2.30 p.m. and will be held in room 116 in the College Buildings, Russell Square.

Action Points
Resources and Planning Committee
2.30pm Tuesday 10 March 2015

Minute	Item	Action	Deadline	By
19. 24.	Fossil Fuel Industries Divestment (FFID)	The working group to report on findings re impact of fossil fuel industries divestment.	9 June RPC meeting	FFID Committee Chair

DRAFT