



# SOAS Students' Union Staff and Officer Protocol

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**Review date (by):**

**Manager responsible for implementation:** CEO

**Trustee responsible for interpretation:** Chair of the People and Talent Committee

## 1. Introduction

- 1.1 SOAS Students' Union has as its principle purpose the provision of opportunities for students at SOAS to experience education in the widest sense. To this end SOAS SU is structured as a self-governing organisation. Central to the resources of SOAS SU are the employed staff who provide for continuity, professional advice, managerial expertise and the day-to-day operation and implementation of policy. The purpose of this protocol is to clarify the relationships between students, their elected representatives and staff.
- 1.2 While each staff member will wish to establish their own particular working relationships, this protocol, together with other agreements and contracts between staff and SOAS SU, will be recognised as contractual in the event of any dispute.
- 1.3 The Chief Executive will ensure that every staff member and elected officer is issued with a copy of this protocol.
- 1.4 The terms of this protocol will apply to all staff irrespective of their position in the organisation and their status as a member/or not of a Trade Union.
- 1.5 Any breach of this protocol will be considered as a serious disciplinary matter.



## 2. Intent

2.1 It is the specific intention of this Protocol to ensure that the Students' Union:

- Complies with all relevant employment legislation and policies currently in force.
- Promotes positive and collaborative working relationships across the organisation including between employed staff and elected officers.
- Protects the conduct of its democratic policy-making from any inappropriate interference by employees.
- Commits to the effective implementation of an Equality and Diversity Policy.
- Maintains sound employment practices and good staff relations.

## 3. Definitions

3.1 In this Protocol, the following definitions apply:

- “Democratic Policy” is policy that is developed and approved by the elected officers through the democratic structures.
- “Policies” are documents, such as this one, largely developed by staff, which provide frameworks and procedures for the day-to-day operations of the organisation.
- “Staff” are individuals or groups of individuals who are employed by SOAS Students' Union.
- “Student Staff” are students at SOAS who are working during their period of study, but whose primary purpose at the University is as a student. Permanent staff who have chosen to undertake a course to complement their work will not normally be regarded as student staff.
- The distinction between “Staff” and “Student Staff” in this document exists to provide guidance on issues of conflicting priorities. In the event of confusion as to the status of an individual staff member, guidance from the Chief Executive will be sought.

## 4. Staffing matters and elected officers

4.1 Elected officers provide political leadership to the organisation, through democratic means. They represent the members of SOAS SU and work closely with staff to ensure that the operations of the Students' Union, particularly those within an officer's portfolio, cater for, and are responsive to, the needs of the membership. Their roles are defined within the [Schedules to the Constitution](#).

4.2 As well as being ‘Major Union Office Holders’ and Trustees, the Co-Presidents are also employees of the Students' Union and are subject to relevant HR procedures, as outlined in their contract of employment.

4.3 The Students' Union management team take responsibility for ensuring that organisational direction is informed and influenced by the political agendas of elected



officers and that there is alignment, where possible between strategic plans and democratic policy.

- 4.4 In many instances, elected officers (in particular, but not exclusively, Co-Presidents) work closely with staff members. Staff members and officers are expected to invest time and effort to ensure that productive working relationships are developed.
- 4.5 Broadly, however, the work of staff is to be directed through the management structure, and elected officers' impact on the day-to-day work of staff should be limited to the development of democratic policy, discussions within the Trustee Board for Officer Trustees, and discussions with SOAS SU managers.
- 4.6 Courtesy between elected officers and staff is expected at all times and officers will never instruct, or criticise, the performance of staff without observing the requirements of the line management structure. If elected officers have concerns about the performance, priorities or conduct of a member of staff, they should raise this directly with the Chief Executive.
- 4.7 Relationships of an intimate nature between staff and officers should be avoided. When a relationship of this nature arises, it should be disclosed by the staff member to their manager and by the officer to the Chair of Trustees to protect all involved from accusations or perceptions related to conflicts of interest.
- 4.8 The Trustee Board will be the only body with elected representatives empowered to discuss matters relating to recruitment, appointment, remuneration and terms and conditions of staff.
- 4.9 All employee related discussions at Trustee Board shall be closed sessions and there shall be no published minutes of such discussions. The Chief Executive will keep a written confidential record that will be countersigned by the Chair of the Trustee Board as being a true and accurate record of such discussions.
- 4.10 The elected officers of the Students' Union should actively ensure that discussions on individual staff members relating to conduct, performance, recruitment and of terms and conditions do not take place:
  - In University or external media;
  - On online fora or websites;
  - In formal and informal Students' Union meetings;
- 4.11 The membership of the Trustee Board is as specified in the [SOAS Students' Union Constitution](#) and will be supported by the CEO. The Trustee Board shall conduct its affairs in accordance with the provisions of the Constitution and its supporting Schedules and the policy of SOAS Students' Union.



## 5. Responsibilities of staff

- 5.1 Staff members are expected to advise elected officers of the Students' Union on any matter that is within their area of work, but shall not seek in any other way to inappropriately influence the policy-making process.
- 5.2 Staff should not enter into discussion with Students' Union members as to the performance of Union officers.
- 5.3 Staff may not seek to influence the outcome of the democratic processes of the Students' Union, though they may contribute to the administration and fair operation of such processes.
- 5.4 Staff may not show support by the wearing of badges or the display of any campaign literature relating to any internal or external elections.
- 5.5 Unless defined as "Student Staff" in accordance with Section 3 above, the responsibilities and restrictions placed on staff members shall override the privileges of Students' Union membership. In practice:
  - Staff members cannot participate in democratic meetings, though they may contribute to the administration and fair operation of such processes.
  - Staff members should not stand or vote in any Union elections.
- 5.6 Staff may not be members nor participate in the activities of clubs and societies that give expression to political views or opinions that may undermine the roles of elected officers within SOAS SU.
- 5.7 To successfully fulfil their roles, many staff will develop professional working relationships with colleagues from the School. At all times care needs to be taken not to compromise SOAS SU on issues concerning elected officers or the democratic policy of the organisation.
- 5.8 The Chief Executive is the designated senior staff member with responsibility for servicing and attending Trustee Board meetings and employed to provide professional advice and continuity in the organisation's affairs.
- 5.9 The Chief Executive will be in attendance at all meetings of the Trustee Board. When discussions directly relate to them, they will be asked to leave the meeting.
- 5.10 The Chief Executive, after consultation with the Union Co-President Democracy and Education may appoint a nominee to attend a meeting in their place. Staff may not exercise a vote in any meeting organised under the auspices of the SOAS SU Constitution.



## 6. Student staff

- 6.1 Student staff may be employed by SOAS SU to carry out specific duties within SOAS SU's employment structure.
- 6.2 Student staff shall enjoy the full rights and privileges of membership, except for any restrictions placed on that staff member whilst on duty. In particular:
- Student staff may not campaign on an issue or in an election whilst on duty for SOAS SU.
  - Points 5.1 to 5.7 above apply to student staff whilst on duty or acting as a staff member.
- 6.3 Student staff are permitted to speak at SOAS SU meetings but must not draw attention to the fact that they are members of staff and should not wear staff uniform at the time.
- 6.4 Student staff are precluded from raising any matters in relation to their employment with SOAS SU in any public forum or meeting. They should raise any complaints or grievances about their employment through the line management structure and have recourse through the relevant HR processes.

## 7. HR procedures

- 7.1 This Protocol does not affect any employee's right to access or utilise relevant SOAS Students' Union HR processes.

## ACCESSIBLE FORMAT INFORMATION

This document can be made available in large print and electronically upon request. If you require another alternative format please contact us to discuss your requirements.

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