



Union General Meeting Minutes

20th January 2020

4pm – 6pm

Atrium

Chair: May Gabriel (Rethink Mental Illness)

Agenda

1. Ground Rules and Introduction
2. Ratifying Previous UGM Minutes
3. Executive Committee Reports
4. **Motion 1:** My Reading List is Black Campaign
5. **Motion 2:** Stop University of London Collusion with the Egyptian Regime
6. Emergency Motion 1
7. Emergency Motion 2
8. Emergency Motion 3
9. AOB



Discussions and Actions

1. Ground Rules and Introduction

Quora was counted and reached.

May briefly ran through the Ground Rules of the UGM as displayed on the slides (also available on the SU Governance Library).

May introduced the change to the running order of the UGM as used in the last UGM, whereby QUESTIONS come immediately after the PROPOSAL of a motion. There were no disagreements to this change.

2. Ratifying Previous UGM Minutes

Sabrina Shah read through a printed copy of the minutes from the previous meeting and confirmed them to be accurate

3. Executive Committee Reports

Sabbatical Officer and Executive Committee reports were displayed on the screen briefly for those in attendance to read.

Reports available: <https://soasunion.org/pageassets/democracy/governance/EXEC-Rep-20-Jan-2020.pdf>

4. Motion 1: My Reading List is Black Campaign

Proposal:

The motivation behind this campaign is that the reading list at SOAS is predominantly white, and when using black authors it tends to be the same names or they're only part of the recommended reading. There needs to be better representation of black people at SOAS. This will help challenge the perception that western literature is the most factual academic source. We want a cross-department online database of black literature. We would like SOAS to:

- 1 – Provide labour and finance: in supporting us in collecting information and categorising it, and funding a paid platform with IT support to look after the reading list
- 2 – Course convenors to incorporate the literature into the required readings, and SOAS library to update its books so students have access to all books on their reading lists

Questions:

No

Amendments:



Amendment 1:

“That SOAS SU will campaign the school to...” to be added to the beginning of each resolution

The SU can't make the school change its policies but we can lobby them to make change

Questions:

None

Speech Against:

None

For/Against:

None

Vote:

Amendment passes

Speech Against:

No

For/Against:

No

Proposer Summary:

Please vote for this motion!

Vote:

Motion passes

5. Motion 2: Stop University of London Collusion with the Egyptian Regime

Since September 20th Egypt have been detaining many people. The UK can make progress with the Egyptian regime. Lots of universities are building campuses in Egypt. There is an open letter going around signed by over 200 academics condemning branch campuses opening in Egypt. UK universities are putting student fees above students. We would like to write to the Egyptian ambassador to release political prisoners, endorse the open letter, join a delegation of UoL to collaborate with the academics, and there is an Amnesty International vigil that we would like the SU to send a banner to.

Questions:

None

Amendments:

Amendment 1:



[3.4]...And support other social movements in London and Egypt organising and campaigning for the above

[3.1]...And call for a two-way arms embargo on Egypt

Questions:

None

Speech Against:

None

For/Against:

None

Vote:

Amendment passes

Speech Against:

None

For/Against:

None

Proposer Summary:

Just again, it would be great if we could get this motion to pass, including its amendments!

Vote:

Motion passes

6. Emergency Motion 1

Support the UCU Call for Strike Action Over the Four Fights One Voice Dispute
(**MOTION CAN BE FOUND AT THE END OF THIS DOCUMENT**)

Proposal:

The UCU branch at SOAS is balloting for strike action. Balloting closes on January 28th. If in favour there will be 14 days of strikes over 4 weeks from February 28th. This is a chance to show solidarity for the UCU strikes, acting against casualisation and the use of our fees to fund higher management while staff are still treated poorly. The strike is happening across the UK. We're in a powerful position to support our staff. This is in support of the Four Fights One Voice dispute – over falling pay, the racial and gender pay gap, increases in casualisation, and unsafe workloads.

Questions:

Q: Is there scope to include a call by the SU to end the requirement to enforce border controls for monitoring international students and the enforcement of prevent guidelines? Or are the main goals fixed by UCU policy?

A: These planned strikes are for what UCU is fighting for in the sector. It's a nationwide approach. We definitely should use these strikes, if they happen, to facilitate other learning and link to other



campaigns. However, this strike is primarily about the UCU issues.

POI: For clarification, in supporting this motion does that mean that if the university supports the strikes then the students will automatically support the strikes?

A: Yes

Q: Resolution 3.2 mentions negotiations about how students will take action. Who will be making the decisions about what student action will look like?

A: If the strikes happen at SOAS then we will call an emergency UGM and we will discuss what actions we will be invested in.

Amendments:

None

Speech Against:

None

For/Against:

None

Proposer summary:

Basically, voting on this motion means we fully support the proposed UCU strikes but we will meet up again as a union to talk through what we will do if the strikes do happen.

Vote:

Motion passes

7. Emergency Motion 2

Save Our Teachers, Save SOAS. Cut Managers

(MOTION CAN BE FOUND AT THE END OF THIS DOCUMENT)

Proposal:

Last week SOAS management made the decision to suspend all academic research leave for the next academic year, meaning there will be more permanent staff on campus at all times, meaning they'll be doing more teaching with no increase in pay. Graduate teaching staff and fractional staff will likely have contracts suspended or lose their jobs. This is being advertised as an end to casualisation but is actually making casualised staff even more casual or making them lose a job. The rationale for this cut is to save £1.5 million but there's no justification about how firing these people will do that as they only cost the university £400,000 but they're currently hiring a director who will cost around £400,000. Around 300 jobs are at risk.

Questions:

Q: In terms of senior management level cuts [as proposed in the resolutions] is there any way to make it more specific? You mention the staff who earn £1.2 million, so could we target them in terms of salary cuts? Could you make the demands more specific?

A: This would be proposing an amendment which would have to be very clear on its wording. We could discuss this more if its proposed as an amendment. In terms of "senior management level"



we're talking about the 8 staff members below the director, as since 2018 3 pro-directors have been added and so around £300,000 spent on these staff while others are on precarious contracts.

POI – The director earns around £300,000+ but the other 8 people get over £100,000. We don't know who these people are, we only know the director, and so it's hard to say we want it to be directed at these people as we don't know who they are.

Q: Could you clarify how this would impact students in terms of classes and lectures?

A: In my experience as a final year undergraduate this year I've seen increases in external tutors as contracts at SOAS are becoming more precarious and other universities offer better contracts. This means a drop in the quality of teaching as lecture jobs are more stressful and lecturers don't feel cared about. It's also likely to lead to a bigger turnover of staff so you'll have less interactions with your teachers.

POI – We currently have a series of situations where members of teaching staff have concurrently agreed to teach classes and are on teaching leave, leaving students with no lecturers as they're away on leave. So for some students this would mean their lecturers are actually here.

Q: Can we clarify what support we're proposing to provide?

A: This [resolution 3.1] is just to say that whatever staff decide to do we will support them. We will then follow up with what we're going to do.

Amendments:

None

Speech Against:

None

For/Against:

None

Proposer Summary:

The main point [of this motion] is that even if there are more permanent staff on campus those staff will be taking longer hours with no pay increase resulting in poorer quality work.

Management are trying to pit permanent staff against fractional staff as they're testing the ground with the most vulnerable workers so they can take it to more permanent staff. Please vote for this – it's our duty as SOAS students to support the staff.

Vote:

Motion passes

8. Emergency Motion 3

Equal Representation for all Minorities

(MOTION CAN BE FOUND AT THE END OF THIS DOCUMENT)



Proposal:

We submitted this as Turkish citizens feel discriminated at SOAS due to words such as fascists being associated with Turkish nationals. Each nation has the right to exist without political bias.

Images and wording shouldn't be bias against minorities. We should empower the unbiased environment. The SU shouldn't promote a campaign which would ostracise a particular minority group.

Questions:

Q: Do you think it's appropriate to use language such as 'victimise' and 'oppress' for a people that is – in terms of systematic oppression – the ones that are generally the oppressors?

A: I don't want to be politicised in this school, I want to be represented as a cultural identity.

Q: Is it fair to blame what we can call 'unfair targeting of Turkish people' on the Kurdish society and the previous UGM as opposed to people's indiscriminate racism against Turkish people?

A: My point remains the same. It is okay for the Kurdish society to have campaigns against the government but as a Turkish citizen I want to be able to express my culture as I want without prejudice.

Q: I'm struggling to understand how a critique of the Turkish state translates to a critique of Turkish students at SOAS? What is stopping Turkish students expressing themselves at SOAS or expressing their views? I don't see how the Students' Union and the campaigns it supports need to apply to the opinion of every single person.

A: Because when we say something about the issue we are directly being stigmatised. I don't feel I can express my ideas in SOAS as a Turkish citizen. When you support something politically you should have a place for other people to explain this. People always ask me about the Kurdish struggle as a Turkish person – I want to be asked about my academic study and not about the Kurdish struggle. This is affecting me.

Q: I'm from the Kurdish society and I want to know if you can provide any proof of us stigmatising Turkish students at SOAS? We don't feel like we attack Turkish people, only the state. We can't control what people think from doing their own research.

A: When you say 'Turkish invasion' or 'boycott Turkey' it is directly related to us. You can criticise the government but I just want to have cultural representation.

Q: How would you suggest we talk about the state oppression without mentioning Turkish or Turkey?

A: You can use the government or the party names.

Q: I am a Turkish student and I've never felt this. Not to discount your experiences but I don't understand how this will help people to stop asking uncomfortable questions or talk about the issues? We are in a political university so there are always political conversations happening.

A: I just want more support to the cultural events, and before submitting anything related to political ideology I want to be asked for my opinion as an involved party.

POI – The Kurdish society motion from the last UGM was an emergency motion so the Turkish society weren't aware of the motion being submitted

Q: Why does the person opposing a motion need to be informed?



A (from Deputy Chair): We release motions in advanced so people can have their voices heard. Emergency motions are not common practice and it undermines people's ability to rally and mobilise. So there is significance in people being able to have the opportunity to know things are being discussed.

Q: Who determines if a motion is an emergency or not?

A (from Deputy Chair): The chair

Q: What kind of amendments would you want to SU campaigns?

A: I want to make sure the boycott Turkey campaign doesn't affect Turkish nationals directly.

Amendments:

None

Speech Against:

I'm from the Kurdish Society and we have Turkish students in the society. No one has ever felt offended or stigmatised by the terms in our campaigns or statements. This motion is against the terminology we've used but I don't think it needs to be. If we've caused distress we will be more careful in future with the wording we use in future statements, but aside from that this isn't important enough for a motion. We apologise for any distress caused – the SU could moderate what we put out but I don't think this is enough for a motion. Other Turkish people here have said they aren't offended.

For/Against:

For: I would like to answer a question asked by someone about how do you feel stressed and do you express your opinion? If you're pro something then someone against the idea will feel pressure. We feel pressure when we enter the JCR and see pictures and posters. It's a pro-Kurdish and Palestine area. There's not a relaxed environment for discussions.

POI: The SU has a safer spaces policy. If there's anything that makes you feel uncomfortable or singled out you can speak to the SU who will remove it.

Against: Apologies to you for your personal experience but I don't think this should be a UGM motion. 1 – Some political campaigns go against our safer spaces policy so we wouldn't support anything that minimises a minority. 2 – Someone will always be upset or distressed when their political ideology is challenged but the union can't resolve this. 3 – The Kurdish society motion from the last UGM was not directly targeting Turkish nationals. Even with language such as 'Turkish invasion' if you say an invasion from another country we don't automatically go to the public but the military and the government. The motion and resolves are a bit misdirected and should've been towards equal cultural representation.

Proposer Summary:

(Summarised by Co-President Welfare & Campaigns as proposer opted out of giving a summary)
This motion is talking about the discrimination and distress that some Turkish students are feeling at the moment mainly stemming from the Kurdish society motion from the last UGM.



Vote:
Motion falls

9. AOB
None



Emergency Motion 1

Title:	Support the UCU Call for Strike Action Over the Four Fights One Voice Dispute
Proposer:	Valeria Racu

This Union Notes:

- 1.1 a) That SOAS UCU branch is currently balloting for 14 days of strike action that have been called at a national level;
- b) that the ballot closes on 28th January 2020, and strike action has been called from the 20th of February until the 13th of March (Thursday 20th, Friday 21st, Monday 24th, Tuesday 25th, Wednesday 26th, Monday 2nd, Tuesday 3rd, Wednesday 4th, Thursday 5th, Monday 9th, Tuesday 10th, Wednesday 11th, Thursday 12th and Friday 13th)
- 1.2 a) That this is a national dispute against Universities UK, which represents 68 University employers, in order to regain security and good working conditions for the sector at a national level.
- b) that this dispute started 3 years ago over pension cuts, due to UUK saying it would stop offering staff traditional “defined benefit” pensions, which offer a certainty of income in retirement, and instead put out a proposal to shift staff into a riskier, less generous “defined contribution” plan, which offers no assured pension;
- c) that the dispute has now expanded to four demands centred around falling pay, gender and racial pay gap, precarious employment practices and unsafe workloads, aiming to gain commitments at national level on the fight against casualisation in Higher Education.
- 1.3 a) That the current SOAS Director sits on the Universities UK Board, which is the “decision-making body” of Universities UK, focussing “on UK-wide issues and those issues in the constituent nations of the UK that have UK-wide implications or interest”;
- b) That SOAS, being represented on the Universities UK Board, is in an instrumental and powerful position to influence Universities UK proposals and decisions;
- c) That Universities and Colleges Union (UCU) represents a large number of academic staff nationwide, and at SOAS;
- d) That UCU ran a campaign to encourage young, career-starting academics, such as PhD students, to join the Union in 2017 and made membership free for those on teaching contracts in Further Education colleges and Higher Education institutions;
- e) That many UCU members who are in the early stages of their career are also members of the Students’ Union, and have been at the forefront of the anti-casualisation campaign at SOAS, Fractionals For Fair Play;

This Union Believes:

- 2.1 a) That supporting academics on increasingly precarious contracts is an important campaign in the fight against racialised and gendered exploitation in universities, which are mirrored in issues that campaigns such as ‘Decolonising SOAS’ seek to challenge;
- b) that showing solidarity towards SOAS staff members, in this case academic, is essential in order to show a united front against the marketisation of our education, especially when education fees are



constantly raising and increasingly going towards managerial roles rather than making their way to the people responsible for our education;

c) That the uncertainty and precarity of the sector which Universities UK is not addressing are counterproductive in creating a Higher Education system which has University staff valued and treated with dignity and respect;

d) That strike action, locally and nationwide, despite always being a last resort, is one of the key mechanisms to resist negative changes and protect rights and working conditions across Higher Education;

e) That winning this battle will give confidence to young academics, students and society more widely that we can shape our futures if we come together and take action against privatisation and commercialisation of our education;

This Union Resolves:

- 3.1 To support and show solidarity to the UCU strikes at SOAS and other institutions
- 3.2 To keep students informed about the negotiations and how students can take action to influence these negotiations to a fair resolution for UCU members;
- 3.2 To lobby SOAS Director, as a member of the UUK Board, to support the UCU's demands and put pressure on the UUK Board to reach a resolution as soon as possible,
 - 1.3 If strikes are called by the SOAS UCU branch:
 - a) To gain assurances from SOAS Senior Management Team that no student will be adversely impacted by the strike when it comes to graduation and continuation in their studies;
 - b) To call an Emergency Union General Meeting in which the Student Union will decide how to collaborate and support the strikes, including how to coordinate a student solidarity presence on UCU official picket lines at SOAS and at UCU-called protests; how to respect the picket line and encourage students to not come into SOAS premises on official strike days; and how to develop, in coordination with SOAS UCU, Unison and others, any other forms of solidarity action that students can take, including providing student support at the picket line.

Amendments:

Emergency Motion 2

Title:	Save Our Teachers, Save SOAS. Cut Managers
Proposer:	Imran Jamal

This Union Notes:

- 1.1 SOAS management has suspended all academic research leave for the academic year 2020-21
- 1.2 SOAS management wants to drastically reduce the number of fractional teaching staff across the school
- 1.3 The rationale for these cuts is to make a further £1.5m saving



1.4 By some estimates the cost of fractional teaching at SOAS is £400k

This Union Believes:

- 2.1. By suspending research leave SOAS will lose its position as a research university, having a long term adverse impact on the institution
- 2.2. It is a cynical move by SOAS to claim it is no longer dependent on fractional staff by getting rid of all fractional staff
- 2.3. Fractional members of staff are the most precarious members of teaching staff and by abolishing fractional posts a large number of teachers will be without their livelihoods
- 2.4. The school should be finding ways to help fractional members of staff out of precarity rather than making them more vulnerable
- 2.5. This is addition to the £1.5m cuts made through OPS last year. There has been no justification how much saving will be made by the new changes and cuts
- 2.6. A university reduced teaching staff but with an increase in students will adversely impact students, particularly those from marginalised backgrounds
- 2.7. Whilst cutting staff numbers over the past few years the number of senior managers has increased, with 07% of staff taking home 3% of the overall staff salary budget
- 2.8. The total fractional budget by some estimates is roughly the same as the salary of two of the highest paid individuals at SOAS
- 2.9. There are roughly 300 members of staff who may be affected by the changes
- 2.10. 9 members of staff at SOAS collectively earn over £1.2m

This Union Resolves:

- 3.1 To demand:
 - a) No cuts to fractional staff
 - b) No suspension of research leave
 - c) Open the books – financial transparency
 - d) Any cuts, must first be made at the senior managerial level
- 3.2 To support academic and professional members of staff in any action they decide to take against the changes SOAS management are trying to implement, such as walkouts, protests, etc.

Amendments:

Emergency Motion 3

Title:	Equal Representation for All Minorities
Proposer:	Ummugulsum Kurukol

This Union Notes:

- 1.1 The political campaigns which are supported by SOAS Union on behalf of students cause distress and have drawbacks for minority groups. Specifically, the full support to Kurdish Society's actions targets the Turkish students by stereotyping all nation instead of targeting the political body in Turkey



1.2 Turkish students have been struggling at SOAS to express their opinions freely and felt discriminated because of the misleading and one-sided information about the nation

1.3 Turkish nationals are stigmatised because of the intense usage of descriptions like fascist or oppressors before knowing their cultural entity.

This Union Believes:

2.1. Each nationality and minority have a right to equally represent its culture and identity before political biases by not forcing them to explain themselves against the stigma.

2.2. Every student at SOAS should express themselves in a free and open atmosphere without hesitating to be shamed or stigmatised because of their counter opinion towards a specific ideology or group to create a more democratic environment for discussion and support.

2.3. Usage of images and wordings shouldn't target one nation by stressing negative features which create stereotypes and give minorities struggle to promote their culture.

This Union Resolves:

3.1 To empower the unbiased environment by considering all involved parties, specifically for political campaigns

3.2. Not to promote a campaign on behalf of the student body until it is made sure not cause any distress to a particular minority group

3.3. To amend the campaigns which directly targets Turkish nationals by giving an equal representation to prevent discrimination

Amendments: