

## 2016-2017

### SOAS SU Educational priorities:

#### Widen the scope of scholarships for refugees:

Education beyond borders is a campaign run by SOAS solidarity with refugees and displaced people. The aim of the campaign is to pressure the university into providing some scholarships to displaced people with a focus on asylum seekers. Asylum seekers live in the U.K. on around £5 a day with no access to student finance or work and therefore are often left behind when their peers go off to study at undergraduate level. So far the SOAS has provided 7 fee waivers for people who already have refugee status. We are urging them to follow the example of 40 other universities and provide a number places and living costs to displaced people regardless of their immigration status in the UK.

#### Accessible education (Lecture recordings):

As part of our campaign to attain a more accessible education at SOAS, the Student Union is proposing to have lectures recorded and to make them available online for students to listen. Some lectures already record lectures while others allow individual students to record the lectures on their smart phones. Majority of lecture halls as well classroom are already equipped with the technology, so it would only make it logical for all lectures to be recorded for the benefit of students. This is essential especially for disabled students as the DSA is being cut

#### Tackling the Attainment Gap:

Over the past academic year, the student union conducted research on the attainment gap. The results of the research highlight the systematic marginalisation that working class and students of colour face as a result of the curriculum and teaching methods at SOAS.

**The report is available for all to read.** The Union has the following recommendations:

1. Establish the infrastructure necessary for a strategy to reduce the gap.
2. Name and acknowledge institutional racism and attainment gaps.
3. Address institutional racism.
4. Address BME underrepresentation within the staff and student body.
5. Create systems for accountability.
6. Create an inclusive learning and teaching environment by defining what these terms mean and address the white curriculum by undertaking a full scale audit of every course reading list.
7. Clarify and communicate existing support available.

#### Decolonising SOAS: Confronting the White Institution:

Decolonising SOAS is a campaign that aims to address the structural and epistemological legacy of colonialism within our university. We believe that SOAS should take a lead on such questions given its unique history within British colonialism. In light of the centenary and SOAS' aims of curating a vision for itself for the next 100 years, this conversation is pivotal for its future direction.

Our aims are a continuation of the campaign last year:

1. To hold events that will engage in a wider discussion about expressions of racial and economic inequality at the university, focussing on SOAS.
2. To address histories of erasure prevalent in the curriculum with a particular focus on SOAS' colonial origins and present alternative ways of knowing.
3. To interrogate SOAS' self-image as progressive and diverse.
4. To use the centenary year as a point of intervention to discuss how the university must move forward and demand that we, as students of colour, are involved in the curriculum review process.

5. To review 10 first year courses, working with academics to discuss points of revamp, reform and in some cases overhaul.
6. To make sure that the majority of the philosophers on our courses are from the Global South or it's diaspora. SOAS's focus is on Asia and Africa and therefore the foundations of its theories should be presented by Asian or African philosophers (or the diaspora).
7. If white philosophers are required, then to teach their work from a critical standpoint. For example, acknowledging the colonial context in which so called "Enlightenment" philosophers wrote within.

### **Defending Education:**

In light of the government's recent White Paper on education and the TEF guidelines, the hikes in fees and the cuts to the maintenance grant, it is our priority to keep education accessible for all. SOAS continually pledges it wants to do more to promote widening participation within this university, but it makes no sense inviting working class teenagers within it's walls if they will not be able to afford fees or the cost of living.

Action points:

1. Create more bursaries and grants for working class students
2. Promote the bursaries and grants that are already available
3. Engage with the local community to ensure our knowledge production is more widely accessible
4. Scrap the proposed hike in fees and take a stand for once for the sake of education being for all and not just for those that can afford it

### **Improve the Treatment of Mental Health**

The support that SOAS provides students who are suffering from mental illness falls short in many regards. Many students feel isolated as a result of academic, financial or social pressures. While the overall goal of lobbying the university to increase funding for mental health and wellbeing is ongoing, there are several other strategies the union wishes to embark upon in the year ahead.

1. Reform the mitigating circumstances policy by making it more transparent, easier to understand and involve the students' lecturers and Student Advice and Wellbeing (SAW) in the process.
2. Push for alternative forms of assessment. Many students suffer from poor mental health as a result of the pressure surrounding exams. Furthermore, exams merely demonstrate a student's ability to memorise facts. We would like to push for assessment that demonstrates a wider set of skills including creative and critical thinking.
3. Improve peer support at SOAS. While the university may not provide sufficient support there are many ways in which students can help each other. The union would like to create peer support networks and increase the frequency of sessions such as the 'Self Love' workshop, which help to build resilience.