

**Your chance to give us  
in-person feedback!**



**11th - 15th March 2024**

**SPEAK  
WEEK!**

**2024**

## **What is Speak Week?**

Speak Week is an SU initiative that was run by the SOAS SU to shine a light on the student voice at SOAS. It is an annual event that gives students the opportunity to be heard in a different way, and for staff to take actionable feedback that is communicated in an organised fashion.

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# Speak Week Report

## Goals

The goal of this event was to reach students with questions on how they would like SOAS to be improved, but to do it in a way that was interactive and that would help prevent “survey fatigue”. We wanted to engage with students that wouldn’t necessarily get involved otherwise. This was the first Speak Week done at SOAS, so it was an exercise in quality over quantity. The goal for Speak Week was to get honest feedback about what can be changed to increase student satisfaction.

## Method

### *Preparation*

In order to figure out what questions would be useful for students to answer we had **several meetings** to discuss this. Furthermore, during these meetings we decided the **type of activities** we should do, how long the Speak Week should be and what the **budget** would be. During this time, we also made **posters and emails** to go out explaining what Speak Week is, and how it would be interesting to the student body. We also had an email go out to give people the opportunity to **volunteer** to help out.

### *How the event was advertised*

We made a poster for Speak Week, that was put all around campus, and left at the Student Union reception desk. The graphics for this poster were also put up on the screens in the student bar and sent out with the emails advertising the event. The poster had the Student Union logo on it to let students know that it was related. It also had the events and dates on it. Finally, we added the QR codes on to it so that people could sign up to the focus groups, and to help volunteer.

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**SPEAK WEEK!**

**14/03 ACADEMIC FOCUS FEEDBACK GROUP**  
IF YOU WERE IN CHARGE OF SOAS FOR A DAY  
WHAT WOULD **YOU** CHANGE, WHAT WOULD **YOU**  
KEEP AND WHAT WOULD **YOU** GET RID OF?

**13/03 STUDENT UNION FEEDBACK FOCUS GROUP**  
In MB P G51 at 11am - 12pm  
HOW CAN THE STUDENT UNION HELP TO GIVE  
**YOU** THE SOCIAL EXPERIENCE THAT YOU WANT  
AT UNIVERSITY?

**13/03 GENERAL FEEDBACK FOCUS GROUP**  
In B203 at 5pm - 6pm  
IF SOAS COULD GIVE **YOU** THE PERFECT  
ACADEMIC EXPERIENCE, WHAT WOULD THAT  
LOOK LIKE?

Scan to participate!

Scan to help out!

## Questions asked

We came up with three questions that we felt encompassed what we wanted feedback on for the events. These questions were the questions that came up on the Student Feedback form as well.

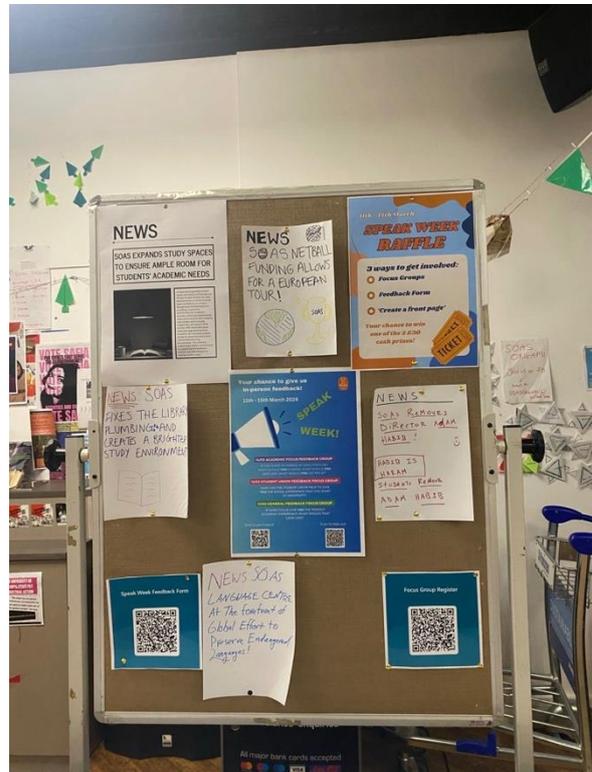
1. If SOAS could give you the perfect academic experience what would that look like?
2. How can the Student Union help to give you the social experience that you want at university?
3. If you were in charge of SOAS for one day, what would you do?

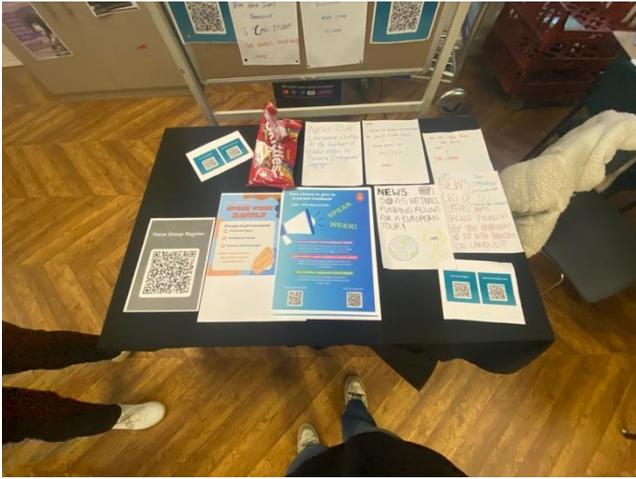
## Format of the Week

During the week of Speak Week, we separated the events into three sections.

1. We had a stall in the JCR that had several different types of activities that included “Creating your own Newspaper front page”, the main Student Feedback Form, and the chance to participate in a raffle.
2. We had two focus groups that people could sign up to participate in on the Wednesday.
3. We walked around campus asking people to fill out the Feedback form and come to participate in the Focus Groups.

## JCR Stall





# NEWS

## SOAS EXPANDS STUDY SPACES TO ENSURE AMPLE ROOM FOR STUDENTS' ACADEMIC NEEDS



In response to growing student needs, the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) has taken decisive action to enhance study space availability on campus. Recognizing the importance of providing a conducive environment for academic pursuits, SOAS has implemented measures to ensure that students have ample room to study, collaborate, and excel in their studies. With expanded study areas and upgraded facilities, students can now enjoy greater access to resources and a more comfortable learning environment. This initiative underscores SOAS's commitment to supporting the academic success and well-being of its diverse student body.

11th - 15th March

# SPEAK WEEK RAFFLE

3 ways to get involved:

- Focus Groups
- Feedback Form
- 'Create a front page'

win \_\_\_\_\_!

These pictures show what the JCR stall looked like as people started filling it up with their Newspaper front pages. We also had a raffle for people to take part in, and as can be seen here this was the template used to advertise it. Finally, we also have the example of the New front page.

We also put the QR codes for the focus groups and the Student Feedback form on the table. This is where our volunteer helped the most, as when the stand was manned, we had skittles out to encourage people to do the survey form. The JCR stall was up all week: Mon – Fri.

### Focus Groups

We held two focus groups on campus, where we provided food for those who joined. It was a 45-minute session where we asked students a set of questions and took down their answers. At the end of the session, we asked if there were any other questions or feedback that the students wanted to give.

## *Walking around campus*

During the week we walked around campus, explaining to the students what Speak Week was, and asked them if they wanted to get involved. We handed out the QR code for the Feedback Form, as well as the QR code for the Focus Groups. This is how we got most of our student engagement with the Feedback form.

## **Results**

Number of students engaged with	
Feedback Form	33
Focus Groups	3
JCR stall	10

Over the course of the entire week, we collected 40 responses from people using the online form, JCR stall and another 3 from the

focus groups. Our largest source of engagement was through walking around, where we got at least half of the responses for the feedback forms.

### *Feedback Form*

**Question 1:** If you were in charge of SOAS for a day what would you change, what would you keep and what would you get rid of?

When answering this question all respondents talked about what they would change. 51% additionally talked about what they would keep, and 45% talked about what they would get rid of.

#### *I. Moving around campus*

48% of respondents said that security and feeling as though walking through campus was a difficult task was a big issue for them. They said that they found security to be over the top, and requested more training, and less securitisation of SOAS. They also said the constant ID check should be changed by barriers, and that IDs should be able to be accessed through the SOAS app. Furthermore, they asked that guests be allowed in completely, or at least to make it easier to bring guests into SOAS.

#### *II. Facilities*

54% of respondents talked about keeping and adding on to the facilities that are already provided by SOAS. These respondents said that they would keep the activities and events but to advertise and organise more job fairs for students. They asked for more snacks to be added in the café in Paul Webley and keep it open for longer. They said they would want to change the coffee in the SOAS Shop, change the Bar and the JCR back by adding the stairs in again, update the learning lounges, and periodically provide free refreshment stalls around campus. Furthermore, students asked for SOAS space to be used up better and asked to keep the SU bar and the bookshop. Finally, they asked for the bathrooms to be cleaner.

### *III. Changing the vice chancellor of SOAS*

12% of respondents said that they would want to get rid of the vice chancellor of SOAS. They spoke specifically of how they felt that he had anti-protest security policies, and how they felt that this doesn't allow for open discussion, and freedom of speech. They feel that these policies don't allow students to feel heard or comfortable to share their thoughts openly whether they be positive or negative. They suggested that they bring in someone new who better aligns with the views of the SOAS community.

### *IV. Academic related requests*

Although this topic was broached as a separate matter in the feedback form, 21% of respondents talked about academic issues. They said they would like it if lecture slides presented in lecture were done better. They also said they would like more seminars, study facilities and more seating in those study areas. They also asked for more charging ports with available chargers for laptops and phones that can be rented out on an hourly basis.

### *V. Discrimination at SOAS*

Two respondents said that they felt that there was discrimination against certain ethnicities and minorities. They said that they would like if there was a greater effort from SOAS to help prevent this from happening.

### *VI. Employment*

Three respondents asked that workers and lecturers are paid more. They also asked that SOAS hire more disability advisors, as they feel that more advisors are needed.

**Question 2:** How can the Student Union help to give you the social experience that you want at university?

#### *I. Events*

84% of respondents said that they wanted more a larger variety of events, and more events in general. This includes events with DJs, more late licenses, a longer period of introduction for new students including master's students, more networking events, guest speakers, more events on the weekends and during the day (for commuter students), UoL crossover events and cultural events. Furthermore, these students requested that the bar do student discounts, and cheaper drinks, specifically cheaper pints. Finally, they asked that the stairs be put back in place, saying that the SU felt more integrated before.

## *II. Society related support*

21% of respondents said they wanted more support for societies. This includes more funding for larger societies, also efficiently responding to enquiries from societies. They also asked for more sports society events to be supported by the SU, as well as opportunities to allow societies to collaborate, and to be provided with more resources and admin support. Finally, they asked that there be better microphones.

## *III. General Support and facilities*

21% of students asked that there be more opportunities for mental health and financial support for students who are struggling. They also said that they would like mental health support that includes a wide range of issues and would want more lobbying for policies that prioritise student welfare. They also asked for a more efficient room booking system and asked that there be a gym put in place at SOAS.

## *IV. Other*

One student asked to make sure that the permanent SU staff stay for the hours that they're meant to, as they felt that the staff doesn't tend to be there when it says they should be.

**Question 3:** If SOAS could give you the perfect academic experience, what would that look like?

### *I. Course Structure*

48% of respondents asked for better course structure. For these respondents this consists of automatic recorded lectures, better spreading out of assignments and exams, more contact hours, more projects as part of academic course work, more drop-ins with academics and better academic resources. Furthermore, they said that attendance should be given a 10% grade, and that auditing should be mandatory. Finally, they said that course information should be made clearer and at an earlier time to prevent so much stress on students, as well as no exams.

### *II. Academic admin*

21% of respondents asked for better timetabling, and a better grading system. They also asked for better response for Mitigating Circumstances, and more self-certifications. Finally, they asked for better and more academic support for students with additional needs within their academic education.

### *III. Finances*

15% of respondents requested for cheaper tuition, and more scholarship opportunities. These scholarships would include part-time students, and international students who are struggling financially.

#### *IV. Academic Opportunities*

15% of these students asked that there be more career finding opportunities, and more study abroad opportunities. Furthermore, they asked for more opportunities and support for academics to speak openly, and for more guest seminars.

##### *JCR Stall*

45% of respondents at the JCR stall wrote “newspaper front pages” that talked about how SOAS should change the vice chancellor to somebody new. Furthermore, they talked about the cost-of-living crisis and how they wished that SOAS could help them there. They also asked that the library plumbing be fixed and that they create a brighter study environment. One “newspaper front page” asked for more funding for sports teams for a European Tour. The last “front page” asked that SOAS creates a language centre as part of a global effort to preserve endangered languages.

##### *Walking around campus*

Although there were no official notes taken from this activity, as it was purely a way to get people involved in the focus groups and feedback form, there were some people who talked about how they would have enjoyed more activities for new students, as well as a decrease in securitisation at SOAS.

##### *Focus Group*

Although only 3 people turned up to the focus group, it still helped give us an idea of what people want to see from SOAS.

#### *I. Student Union*

The students from the focus group said that they felt that there were several things that the SU could improve on.

- i.* The students felt that the SU staff had a lack of punctuality and found it difficult to get in touch with them with one student said, “the SU does not communicate at all.” They said that they felt that the management of the SU could be better and suggested that to make it clear what each of the roles of the SU permanent staff is, it would be good to have a “who is who” board. They suggested that this would be good to show who to contact for different matters, and so those attending SOAS can know what specific roles the SU members have.
- ii.* Furthermore, they said that they felt that the funding in the SU is not very good. They said they felt that students are constantly owed money from the SU.
- iii.* The students said that to help with the feeling of lack of communication between the SU and the student body, that the Instagram account should be more active as it is visited more by students than the website is.

- iv. They also said that they said the response times for email is “incredibly poor” and that does not help with the feeling of no communication between the two. One student even went as far as the say that “SOAS is notorious for not replying”.
- v. Finally, when asked if these students felt that they were represented by the SU, they said they didn’t. They said that the SU should involve others, especially those who are studying masters, as they are only doing one year. They said there needs to be more intense communication about what the SU is and what it does. They said that a lot of it is targeted towards undergraduates.

## *II. Societies*

Although the consensus about societies was positive there were a few things that could be changed according to the students at the focus group.

- i. The students said that advertisement for societies is not very good and suggested that the website should be structured better.
- ii. They also said that there were societies that didn’t really seem to have a point, and highlighted how certain societies with targeted audience such as religion or ethnicity focused societies were better.
- iii. Finally, they proposed more society fairs, in order to allow students to have a look at them in more detail and not just twice a year. They said that they felt that by only doing fairs twice a year it means that student, especially postgrads, find out they missed out on a society purely because they weren’t able to make it to the freshers’ fairs.

## *III. Events*

- i. The students said that would like to see more late licences, and they would like for there to be pub quizzes, as they are both interactive with the students. Furthermore, they said that they would prefer pun quizzes to comedy night.
- ii. They also said that they would feel that events should be communicated better to students, and that they should also be advertised better. They suggested including polls on the Instagram and making the social much more active to make it more interactive with the students.
- iii. Finally, they mentioned how the Lunar Late License included other universities and suggested that this should be implemented more often.

## *IV. Security*

As has been said in other parts of this report, security is an issue that these students said needs to change.

- i. They said that there is too much security, and that it changes the whole mood of the campus. Furthermore, they said that security makes students feel unwelcomed, and that to change this it could be good to put in tap-in services like other London Universities.

- ii. Furthermore, they asked for an alternative to security guards, as they can be hyperaggressive or confrontational due to the way that they are trained. They said that they felt that students feel unsafe with security, and they can be too repetitive with showing IDs.
- iii. Finally, they said that security staff isn't the problem rather it is their use, and the securitisation of protesting at SOAS that is the problem.

#### V. *Facilities*

The students said that there were certain things about the SOAS facilities that could be improved to make SOAS feel more welcoming and enticing.

- i. One student mention that there are cuts for certain course. They said that there are certain courses that can only be studied at SOAS, and there is a lot of uncertainty when it comes to the smaller, more niche courses. They said that these courses are one of the many reasons that people choose to go to SOAS, and if these courses are cut then it will be detrimental to those who joined SOAS for those courses. "They are a part of the SOAS identity".
- ii. Furthermore, the students felt that there should be more indoor seating areas, especially in the bar, as they said they are always short for chairs.
- iii. They also said that the shop should be open for longer.
- iv. Moreover, they asked that there be an extra week of induction activities.
- v. They said that the library is a big plus, but that they wish that the reputation of the SOAS campus could be improved.
- vi. Finally, they said that they would like there to be a gym/sports room.

#### VI. *SOAS Politics*

When asked about SOAS politics, specifically elections and campaigning, they said there could be more proactivity.

- i. They said that they thought more people should have applied for the elections. They said that they thought that it was due to a lack of transparency of the roles. Furthermore, they said that the election candidates were very limited, with one student saying, "I did not like either of these candidates".
- ii. They also said that the campaigning could be improved by releasing the information to the students earlier. They felt that more students would have been voting if this happened.

### **Evaluation**

Although the Speak Week went relatively okay, there were a few things that can be changed in order to make it better.

- i. In order to successfully pull off Speak Week, I believe that the period of planning needs to be extended, and/or there should be more people on the team to plan it. This is due to the fact that it is a very large project.
  - ii. With longer planning this means that the events will be able to be advertised in advance. This will help with getting the word out, and giving students time to sign up, and fill out the feedback form.
  - iii. Advertising for Speak Week should be run for a longer period of time, so that students know about it.
- Finally, due to the death of a student during this week, all comms and publicity were suspended which curtailed engagement early. This was unavoidable and it was the right decision under the circumstances.