

SOAS STUDENTS' UNION

**ANNUAL GENERAL
MEETING
2021**



FOREWORD

Welcome to the 2020/21 SOAS Students' Union Annual General Meeting (AGM) booklet.

This booklet is a formal documentation of the 2020/21 SOAS SU AGM, and is our opportunity to provide greater transparency to our members about the work of the Union during the 2020/21 academic year, as well as our financial status. This is also an opportunity for our elected officers to reflect on their achievements of the year, and be accountable to the student body that elected them.

The 2020/21 academic year was an extraordinary one, with the global covid-19 situation producing an ever changing environment at SOAS and the Students' Union, keeping us on our toes. We tried our hardest to adapt to the needs of our members whilst also lobbying the university and dealing with our own internal Union strategy and maintaining financial sustainability.

We started the academic year with our first ever online only Freshers Fortnight, forcing ourselves and our members to think differently and be resourceful. Hopes of returning to campus in the Autumn term were quickly dashed by national lockdown announcements, which extended throughout the entirety of the academic year. A whole year without being able to come onto campus was not what we expected, but we worked our best to adapt to an online environment and to continue supporting you.

Despite an uncertain year full of restrictions, our officers worked hard to try and achieve their manifesto goals. We know this was a difficult year to do this, however great steps were made by our team this year who worked especially hard to organise events and provide representation to students at a time when they needed it most. Our staff team has also been incredibly adaptable and resourceful, working hard throughout the year to meet changing student and Union needs.

At the time of this AGM - which was pushed back due to covid-19 (the story of our year!) - we are finally returning to campus. We know the effects of the pandemic have not simply disappeared, and we are very conscious and aware of many of our members continuing to be affected by covid in various ways. This is something that we urge the 2021/22 officers to remember and be led by in order to get the best support structures and policies in place for our members.

We hope that the next academic year will allow us to be a more interactive community and really rebuild our campus activities and presence to be more visible for students and encourage them even more to get involved in building the union that they want to see. Whether this be through campaigns, societies, the student rep system or attending UGMs with regular contact with your elected officers. We have a great new team coming in to represent, advocate and lobby for all members, while centering liberation, care and uplifting the voices of those most marginalised in our community. As an SU team this year we have tried really hard to get things right for our members and we hope that we have laid the groundwork for the next team to hit the ground running.

We hope you find the AGM informative and interesting!

Sabrina Shah & Jack Di Francesco

(2020/21 Democracy & Education Co-President / SU Governance, Communication & Sustainability Coordinator)

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TRUSTEE BOARD REPORT

Dear members,

This year was extremely challenging for everyone in the Union; adapting to an online work and support environment for students and staff alike and responding to the financial struggle of the SU Shop and Bar having been closed through February and March in solidarity with UCU industrial action and then remaining closed in light of the Covid-19 pandemic. Many trustees this year continued on from last year following exciting and new online SU elections, with 4 brand new sabbatical officers taking office online. Despite the changing needs of Union members this academic year, the student community and SOAS SU has still remained at the forefront of internal and external issues facing both the student and global community. We have had 4 UGM's this academic year which has continued our powerful history of student organising and democratic engagement with the Union despite being in an online environment.

The main priorities of the Trustee Board were to ensure the financial sustainability and viability of the Union given the significant hit to our finances following the closure of our commercial services (bar and shop). As well as this, we wanted to ensure that being entirely online and not being able to benefit from our usually significant campus presence, we did not lose the engagement of students, especially in democratic processes such as UGMs. We approved changes to our constitution to allow for online UGMs to take place and to add more flexibility to the access and participation of our democratic processes in the Union, giving us the ability to maybe move to a more hybrid and accessible way of doing things. More so than ever, we saw that there are significant (but manageable) barriers in the SU that may hinder its ability to perform at its best. An example of this is incorporation. As an unincorporated charitable body, the financial and legal liability of the Union is entirely on our Trustees, which are the 4 full-time sabbatical officers and our volunteer exec team (all of whom are current students). This carries significant risk both for our student trustees but also for the kind of work that we wish to do in the Union. We passed the motion at Trustee Board and UGM to change the structure of our organisation to a Foundation CIO model for incorporation which will alleviate some of these liabilities, pressures and constraints on our officers, members and the Union as a whole. Some of our other decisions over the last year include ratifying UGM motions, passed by our members by democratic vote online, approving our finance budgets, proposed return to campus plans for a post-pandemic Union and the approval of the proposed Union priorities with the help of our General Manager.

As with last years AGM, the organisational and structural changes that we would have liked to work on were not possible due to the constantly changing situation of the pandemic, whether this was dealing with the need for new safety net and mit circs policy or planning for returning to campus in a safe way. For the incoming officers and trustees, some of the priorities going forward, especially coming out of the pandemic:

- **Incorporation:** While we have started the process and voted through the first stages of changing our charitable organisation status, bureaucratic processes can take a lot of time so this will be an ongoing project that will last long after this team or even the next. One of the most important advantages of becoming an incorporated charitable organisation is that individual trustees will not be personally liable both financially and legally for decisions made by the Trustee Board, as they currently are.

- **Governance/Democracy review:** We would like to see the new team come in and commission a comprehensive governance and democracy review, to not only streamline and make more effective student engagement and organisation of the Union, but also to introduce more varied and accessible accountability measures and democratic engagement with the Union. In addition, we need to make sure that our team is structured in a way that allows us to help as many students as possible as effectively as possible and ensure that this means our staff team are also supported by and supporting the Sabbatical and Part-time officers. This would also allow for an in-depth reflection on our accountability mechanisms as a union and a charity and how we can make these more accessible for both our officers and our members; perhaps painting a new and kinder, more care-based understanding of accountability within the SU.
- **Digital transformation:** Now more than ever, following the need to transfer entirely online this academic year, we need to continue to update and refine our online provision for students. While the SU website has undergone gradual improvements and reviews this year, as a Union we need to change and adapt with student needs and expectations and this requires funding, time and expertise, all of which were unfortunately not able to take priority this year as much as we would have liked. Pursuing digital transformation in the Union will not only modernise and make our website and union more accessible, but will also help our elections, UGM's and referendums be more user friendly too.
- **Financial Sustainability:** As a result of the SU bar and shop being closed for business since February 2020, we have taken a significant hit to our income stream. As a result, this year we were working on a stripped back budget and have had to, and continue to have to make really difficult decisions about the future of the Union and our offering to students. We hope the next team will come in and work with the General Manager to try and diversify our income streams while still leading a Union centering its members and staff's lives.

We have a brand new team coming in next year who we are super excited to handover to. It's been an incredibly challenging, emotional and long year and we have been working really hard to ensure we have laid the groundwork for the incoming team. There is lots to be positive about as we gradually come out of lockdown and we have the opportunity as a Union and student community to come together and rebuild the SU and SOAS that we want to see. As a Trustee Board we have been led by our desire to build a union on the basis of care, for each other and our members and to ensure that we are providing as much support to our members and staff team as possible throughout this devastating pandemic. We hope that the next team will also pursue these ethics and go even further to ensure that we are amplifying student voice and fighting for everyone in our community, especially those most vulnerable and marginalised.

We finally wanted to say a huge thank you for all of your constant engagement, innovation, dedication and energy that you have continued to give the SU against all odds. We hope you have felt supported and part of the Union and that this continues to build long after our current team, and those before us, have gone. Good luck for the year ahead; you got this!!

In Love and Solidarity,

SOAS SU Trustee Board/Executive Committee

TRUSTEE BOARD DECISIONS

2nd December 2020

- Approved the decision for SOAS SU to aim to become an incorporated charity
- Approved the decisions to use the foundation CIO model for incorporation
- Approved the decision to take the topic of incorporation to the student body via a UGM
- Approved a deficit budget for the SU in light of 2019/20 accounts, on the basis the SU will be applying for additional funding
- Approved the decision to hold UGMs online, and the associated constitution changes as proposed by the Governance, Communication & Sustainability Coordinator that would allow this to happen

10th March 2021

- Approved the proposed return to campus plans for SOAS SU, as drafted by the General Manager in line with the proposed national restriction roadmap
- Approved the proposed priorities for the academic year for SOAS SU, as drafted by the General Manager to help focus the SU's resources and actions
- Ratified motions passed in the February 22nd UGM

29th July 2021

- Approved the Top 10 Risks and Actions as proposed by the SU General Manager in the SU Risk Register
- Approved the 2021/22 SU budget, as proposed by the SU General Manager

Email Decisions Made Throughout Year

- Sabbatical Officers to be authorised signatories on the SU bank account (22.10.2020)
- Black Student Support Coordinator role to be adopted by SOAS (31.03.2021)
- Ratified the UGM motion to remove Adam Habib as the Director of SOAS (12.04.2021)

SABBATICAL OFFICER REPORTS



HASAN ZAKRIA

ACTIVITIES & EVENTS

This year has included a lot of improvisation, and trying to offer an online experience which resembled 'normal times'. In August, I was very much thrown in the deep-end as there wasn't a plan in place on what to do for freshers. Luckily, with the assistance of Jack (Comms guy) I created an online Freshers Fayre platform on Microsoft Teams, and provided logistical and organisational support to societies, ensuring we had around 100 freshers events in the space of 2 weeks! Looking back, I'm quite proud of what I achieved, and even though it was hindered by SOAS enrolment issues, there was still good attendance at these events- and over 500 students visited the Freshers Fayre.

Additionally, in order to facilitate connections between students- I hosted 'Speedfriending' sessions throughout the year, and was proud to have received such consistent positive feedback, including 100% of attendees (who filled the feedback form) saying they would return for another session. For future sabbs, I really recommend hosting regular spaces for people just to meet each other, and provide guided conversation topics to encourage discussion! It does wonders for people's self-development, wellbeing and mental health. As attendees stated they felt more confident meeting and interacting with new people, which can be a huge barrier to overcome at university.

I've also enjoyed being able to host events which attract audiences from outside of SOAS, for example my History of Ballroom events which attracted people from over 35 countries, and hundreds of attendees. As well as co-operating with organisations abroad such as Seoul Drag Parade, and providing a platform for Korean artists. I recommend future sabbs to invite more international speakers using online platforms, because it can really grow awareness of SOAS SU around the world. And I've found it means a lot to speakers that an organisation in London has invited them to speak.

Ultimately, whilst I never would have been satisfied with what I would achieve this year, owing to the fact everything is online- I'm proud of the things that I did, and hearing directly from the students I impacted about how much they appreciated what I did. The feedback I got from my 'How to be a bad b*tch' panel was particularly heart-warming. I won on a platform of 'Let 2020/21 be the year of XXXPRESSION', and I encourage future sabbs to look to my manifesto for inspiration, because it has so much potential to TRANSFORM the experience of SOAS students- and you will be able to actually enact it on campus!

SABRINA SHAH

DEMOCRACY & EDUCATION

This year was perhaps the exact opposite of what I expected it to be when I ran for election and in some ways is exactly what I thought this role would be. Working in an online environment not being able to work directly with students and the team has been really challenging but has been an opportunity to come together and support our members by doing the institutional work to create a better and stronger union for the future. Below is a list of the things I have worked on this year, some on my manifesto and others not. Some of the work I have done this year cannot neatly fit into the category of either democracy or education as there is naturally an overlap but I have organised it as best as possible.

Democracy

- **UGMs**

This year we have hosted 3 online UGMs and one extraordinary UGM, including 13 motions, 11 of which passed. One of the motions brought to our extraordinary UGM received record numbers of votes, calling for the removal of the Director. This was a huge show of solidarity and collective democratic engagement with Union policy making structures. The only way that it was possible to hold online UGMs was to make constitutional changes to allow for different meeting formats and voting platforms. This was passed by the SOAS SU Trustee Board. In addition to this, we continually revisited the structure and suitability of Zoom as the online platform for our UGMs in association with our executive committee. In addition, I asked Sara Bafo (President of Goldsmiths SU) to be our permanent UGM Chair to allow for continuity in how our UGMs were run. None of this work could have been done without our Governance, Communication and Sustainability Coordinator, Jack Di Francesco! Big shoutout to Jack for constantly revamping and updating our governance processes and continuing to democratise the Union and our processes.

Unfortunately, due to the pandemic and working online, continuing Get Vocal sessions were not possible but I hope that the next team will be able to bring this back to the Union to increase engagement with our members and most importantly improve accountability of elected officers and transparency of what is happening in the Union. In addition, I hope that the next team will create more spaces for debate and discussion outside of an official union process and structure to encourage political education and discourse within the Union.

- **Executive Committee / Trustee Board**

It can often be a scary prospect to invite external people to be part of our Union given that the SOAS SU has such a proud history of being run by and for students and having students at the heart of the work we do. However, recent years, especially given the financial strain the pandemic has placed on us as a Union, has shown the gaps on our Trustee Board that need to be filled by experts in issues of finance and governance not only to give advice and support to our student Trustees but also to hold the Chair, Sabbatical Officers and General Manager to account for their decisions, both financial and governance related.

We have made great progress in starting the incorporation process for the Union, so that we can ensure that future trustees are not personally legally liable for things. I hope that the next team will continue to pursue this work and support the General Manager in strengthening the long term position of the Union and its members.

I also hope that the executive committee can be a space where part-time and full-time officers are able to come together as a team and lean on each other as friends, colleagues and comrades. We need to be reimagining what accountability can and should look like and operate on an ethic of care and compassion. This should be an active endeavour that the whole team take responsibility for and pride in.

Education

- **Mitigating Circumstances / No-Detriment Policy**

This year was extremely turbulent for academic support provision with ever changing government guidelines and the persistent effects of the pandemic on students both in the UK and across the world. One of the main priorities during my time in office was constantly pushing the school to revise and make the policy fit for purpose. The process for applying for mitigating circumstances was new this year and unfortunately changed throughout the year which made it confusing and more distressing for students who were already struggling with the demands of the academic year. We were able to push and ensure that deadlines for final submissions were extended as much as the School permitted and we never stopped raising it in all the spaces we were in. We won some battles and lost others but we tried our very hardest to get the best possible outcome for the student body. This is something that we will handover to the next team and try to ensure that the relevant parts of the school do not make the same mistakes again.

- **Student Reps**

I was very lucky to be able to work with Antonia in the SU and Yasmin, my fellow co-president on the revised student rep system which had been established by Antonia and Maxine, my brilliant predecessor. The student representative system is now a collaborative project between the University and the Students' Union. We undertook all the training during the first reading week of the academic year and attempted to support all the reps in empowering them in department meetings, student rep forums and the student feedback panel. We have had an incredibly committed and hardworking cohort of student reps this year, and it has been my distinct privilege to have been able to work alongside them and learn so much from them. It has been a really difficult year for student voices but our reps made sure that they took up space and represented their academic cohorts to ensure the best possible student experience this year. We had a brilliant turn out with our student rep survey this year and have a tangible list of things that went well and can be improved on every year.

- **Preventing Prevent**

As included in my manifesto, I continued my work with the Preventing Prevent campaign both at SOAS and on a national organising level to ensure that the classroom is a safe space for all students, especially Muslim students, Black students and students of colour who are disproportionately impacted by the Prevent Duty. We ran training sessions with student reps to educate them on how the Prevent Duty operates within HEI's and started conversations in the community about how we can lobby the university to challenge the government on this racist agenda and to call for the abolition of Prevent and any forms of securitisation and surveillance on campus.

- **Teaching and Learning Strategy**

During consultation for the Teaching and Learning strategy that the school is putting together, I insisted on having decolonising the university at the heart of it to encourage an institutional commitment and approach to creating a fair, free, decolonised university and curriculum. We would have liked to have worked more closely with the Decolonising Working Group but unfortunately in the midst of the pandemic, funding was minimal and institutional and outreach work somewhat stalled. I hope that the working group does not lose the essence and mission that it was established with and that we imagine decolonising the university and curriculum as going beyond reading lists and instead reflect on the type of materials being set, the forms and frequency of assessments and the institutional links and associations that we have.

Looking forward, I hope that the incoming team will focus on union development and maintaining the financial viability of the Union. I also hope that as we have done this year, liberation work and advocating and fighting for the most marginalised in our community is at the heart of the work we do as a Union. This work doesn't just help these respective communities, but also helps the whole community to grow and go from strength to strength. We must always be anti-racist and centre care and compassion in our work and this is something I hope can be continued going into the next year and beyond.

ROZA ATAC

EQUALITY & LIBERATION

Hi y'all, I'm Roza your 20-21 co-president for Equality and Liberation. This year has been a very hard one, having come into this role at a time where we did not know what would happen and change more than 2 weeks in advance has been challenging to say the least. I've had to adapt and do a job that was completely different from what I had imagined, a lot of my year was spent firefighting and attending various boards and committees. Unfortunately I've not been able to achieve most, if any, of my manifesto goals due to having to deal with crisis upon crisis. I must admit though that this year has taught me to think outside of the box when organising and event planning. Furthermore we all were forced to set up accessibility measures which I hope we will only continue and build upon.

The main things I have done this year have been:

- Working to move the consent workshops online and planning for the future of the campaign
- Working closely with SOAS KurdSoc to organise events and further Kurdish representation in the Union and institution
- I hosted a couple of events relating to the different liberation months
- Working closely with the Student Advice and Wellbeing (SAaW) to support students through these trying times

Enough is Enough and the consent workshops have been my biggest project this year, due to lack of resources and time we were unable to host consent workshops during Freshers' week of term 1. I am happy to say we rectified this and hosted the workshops in January. A big part of this project has also been rethinking the future of the campaign and the Union's relationship. Some may be aware that the 5-year funding from SOAS has come to an end, thus we have been working on expanding the campaign and securing funding. Related to this has been the work around the creation of the SGBV policy, its implementation and Report & Support.

As a student, my main focus was organising with the Kurdish society and raising awareness around our culture and struggle. A big motivation in my decision to run was the potential to have a bigger platform for our cause. I'm happy to say I've worked closely with the society to build on our existing platform. Some of the events we organised for example were a discussion on mental health in the Kurdish diaspora as part of Disability History Month; we also held a workshop on Jineology as part of Women's History Month.

All in all this year has been trying and tiring. I'm incredibly grateful and thankful to the SU staff for supporting myself and the other Sabbs, I would not have survived without them. I don't believe I achieved much apart from firefighting constantly. I really hope this experience is not repeated for the incoming sabbatical officers. This has been incredibly demoralising and my hope for the future is that whoever is in my role can work on what they're passionate about and achieve their manifesto aims.

YAMIN ELSOUDA

WELFARE & CAMPAIGNS

I ran for this position back in what feels like the completely different world of March 2020. At the time SOAS planned to severely cut the 'fractional' teaching budget which is what pays for all the casualised teachers who are most of your tutors and sometimes even your module convenors and lecturers. Campaigning was and remains such a massive part of my time at SOAS and I wanted to give back to the vibrant community from whom I learned so much. Of course election week was the first week of lockdown and it became clear that I was going to have to rethink my manifesto and aims.

The Student Union has an amazing presence on campus with our common room normally plastered with posters and banners, multiple events happening every night, campaign stalls outside and in the common room. It became a priority for me to stay connected with all the different groups organising and ensure the Student Union remained accessible online. The type of resources we could provide changed but it was incredible to see the resourcefulness and commitment of students taking on everything from the marketisation of education, workers solidarity to international solidarity. There were specific campaign and policy objectives I wanted to support coming into the role which powerful student communities and collectives were calling for; this included ending the relationship between SOAS and colonial institutions, such as the Ministry of Defense and Israeli universities. BDS campaigning and supporting the SOAS Palestine Society in their work to end SOAS' ties to Israeli Apartheid are essential to this. I also aimed to support the demands of the Trans* Dignity at SOAS campaign such as putting in place a Trans* Dignity policy at SOAS.

In the conditions of the pandemic, student wellbeing took on a whole new meaning, we were reminded again how political welfare is, how our systems of government, education and healthcare have been hollowed out. This year showed us how essential campaigning, building our power, as students and communities with care and welfare in mind, is central to making any justice and having dignified lives. We built on the work of last year's Safer Spaces policy by embedding it more intentionally into all our meetings, workshops, training and all student spaces.

Our year was marked with uncertainty and change, both in terms of the pandemic and how it was managed by the government but also the turn over in SOAS staff. Besides supporting all the amazing campaigns at SOAS I also worked to support individual students making sure they knew what all their options are when they face challenges at SOAS. Whether they pursue a complaint, want to create a group healing space or want to approach it from a campaign perspective.

It is often a struggle to balance welfare, especially in such a challenging moment, with campaigns. Despite this, our year has been marked by many milestones, the result of many years of student campaigning and staff labour has meant we now have an SGBV policy that is survivor centric that was produced by the help of Empowered Campus. Training is now being delivered to staff on receiving disclosures, understanding trauma and will also soon hopefully have appropriately trained investigators. We are also in the process of working with Gendered Intelligence to put together a Trans* Dignity policy that also will involve altering SOAS' systems such as registration and certificate awarding so that our procedures accurately reflect our students' and staff gender identities. This shows us that our wellbeing, especially the most marginalised amongst us is often intimately linked to campaigning wins. Even with bureaucratic issues such as mitigating circumstances and assessment methods, this year students organised petitions and email campaigns to make sure their voice was heard when it came to how the pandemic was affecting their wellbeing and in turn their academic performance. It has been exciting to see the campaigns emerging this year such as SOASWTFees taking the important action of withholding fees and going on tuition strike to demand a free education. Our community has been incredibly mobilised and this all came to fruition in an overwhelming moment of solidarity with racialised students after the All Student Meeting with new SOAS director Adam Habib on the 11th of March when he bullied a Black student who was holding SOAS accountable for their defunding of the BA African studies programme while hypocritically posting BLM statements last summer. Our community was unified in their assertion that there is no place for racist bullying at SOAS.

Looking forward, I believe that there is an urgent priority to reestablish our presence on campus and ensure students know they can depend on and trust us to represent them, support them and advocate for them. Our time online has taught us new ways of working but our student community has always relied on the unique space of the JCR and face to face interactions. We have a renewed opportunity to ensure we are proactively engaging with the world politically as new students join our community. SOAS is facing an incredibly challenging moment where the values that we (the community) stand for are fundamentally opposed to the current Higher Education environment and we must decide what we value, survival at the cost of our beliefs or fighting for a free decolonised radical education. We should always be headstrong in our belief that we have the power to inject care, love and solidarity into all the work we do so we may see a new more just world.

EXECUTIVE OFFICER REPORTS



OSCAR WARD

ACCOMMODATION OFFICER

This was my second term in the role of Accommodation Officer and there's no way around it, this has been an incredibly challenging year for every SU officer. Representing accommodation issues to the SU this year has been difficult, the inability to organise in person which can allow for grassroots campaigning to occur more easily has an uphill battle at times, however this year we've seen more rent strikes and the declaration of a housing emergency within our community, telling SOAS that their accommodation strategy is completely unfit for purpose and their approach of using outsourced providers is nothing more than a blame-shifting exercise which lets them off the hook for the awful conditions and services offered by SOAS' recommended housing providers. As I write this students are still organising a rent strike and last years' rent strike was an incredible success with so many students never having to pay or being offered large discounts for their unfair treatment of students during the pandemic. Unfortunately there is no Accommodation Officer for me to hand over to at the moment, but the officer does not make accommodation change happen at SOAS, it is the grassroots radical organising which rejects the marketised system of higher education and sees solidarity with other campaigns for justice in our community, that makes accommodation change happen, it has been stressful yet a great experience to help out in any way with this radical organising.

Being part of the SU exec this year has been a demanding experience yet this SU has genuinely worked so hard and shown that it will not back down to management. I know for a fact that next year's will continue to do the same, SOAS this year would have been a far worse place if it was not for the SU continually pushing back against management's lack of care or sense for how to navigate this academic year. If you're thinking of running for the SU, consider running for accommodation officer, can't imagine my last two years without it.

HISHAM PRYCE-PARCHMENT & SOHANE YAHYA ANTI-RACISM OFFICERS

Hi guys! Hisham and Sohane here!

We're your 2020-21 Anti-Racism Officers. Thank you for all the support during this crazy virtual year. We know it's really disheartening to have to constantly push through the racism and hostility toward people of colour when we are in a space meant to help us advance our academic goals. Our manifesto goals were forced to change as we moved to a fully online system and had to adapt to different displays of racialised abuse, specifically the events leading to the #firehabib campaign. However, the changes that we have had to make still align with the general goals of our manifesto. The following notes the main activities and events we participated in during our time in the position:

- Organising and planning BHM events online and IG campaigns
- Attending the US and SOAS-UK Sustainability Summit
- Black Womxn History Month events
- 3 reflection sessions with a Nafsiyat black therapist, which was attended by members of the campaign, SU and Art & the African Mind
- Support to AAM in the organising of the People's Tribunal (upcoming)
- Involvement with Twitter storms and contacts with Wits University
- Outreach to gain society supports across other UK SUs

It's on a very bitter note that our time as anti-racism officers ends, but we will continue to fight for justice and hope that our successors will be able to continue to facilitate the struggle for racial justice at SOAS. We're very excited to see what the role continues to bring to the SOAS community.

ELLA SPENCER

CAMPAIGNS OFFICER

Hi everyone, I'm Ella, the 2020/21 SU Campaigns Officer. This year I am happy to have achieved a number of my manifesto aims despite the pandemic, including:

- Working with Preventing Prevent to deliver and facilitate workshops on Prevent, how to resist it and how it fits into broader structures of surveillance and policing to students and external groups beyond campus
- Pushing for democratic decision making and a free, fair and decolonised education from the university through the the SOASWTFees campaign
- Demanding safe and dignified working conditions and fair treatment from management for the cleaning team through the Justice For Workers campaign

Looking forward I am excited to work with the new campaigns officer in supporting existing campaigns on and beyond campus, and strengthening our community of students and workers! I am particularly excited by the prospect of a new divestment campaign which will target SOAS' ties to fossil fuels, the border industry, the Ministry of Defence and the Israeli state.

FELIX HENSON & AMBA JANIUREK

DISABLED STUDENTS & CARERS OFFICERS

Hello! Congratulations to whoever is reading this for surviving these past year and a half, I know it's not been easy and you've done amazing. I do believe that this year Amba and I were able to achieve the majority of our manifesto aims in spite of the added difficulties. We've supported students with individual concerns (a LOT of requests for support with mitigating circumstances this year!), passed a motion ensuring mitigating circumstances will be available to the poorest students too, worked closely with the Disability and Neurodiversity team, got unfair academic policies changed, created an entire month's worth of disability related events for Disability History Month, culminating with an online house party to remember, and created a Disabled Students Society. I'm so proud of the things we have achieved this year, but I'm most proud of the society. The society has provided a lifeline for a number of students throughout the lockdown and its members really came together to support each other in the spirit of interdependency. My [Felix] work here is not done, however, and I will be back next year to continue the good work!

SARA LLOYD-KNIBBS

MATURE STUDENTS OFFICER

The decision to nominate myself as your 2020/21 Mature Students' Officer (and the honour of being elected) has irrevocably shaped and enriched my SOAS experience and I would strongly encourage anyone to stand for elections themselves. It has been an honour to represent the student body on the Exec Committee, Trustee Board, in meetings with senior SOAS staff, and externally at NUS Conference. I am overjoyed to report that throughout the year I have been able to fulfil all but one of my original manifesto pledges, and also achieved several additional things.

As was my mandate, I have fostered a Mature Students Community, collected student testimonials and proactively represented Mature Students in many different SOAS spaces. I have worked a lot with other Officers on centering certain under-represented groups/issues on various agendas, including student parenting, part-time students, accessibility, mental health, misogyny and ageism. Where capacity has allowed me, I have also been involved in supporting other projects such as Women's History Month, and have organised a number of successful events and activities including workshops, training, guest speakers and social events.

Going forward I intend to continue to be involved in SOAS SU until I am able to handover to my replacement in the Autumn term. I am also looking forward to helping support the election and training of Officers for the two new roles I instigated earlier this academic year (Student Parents Officer; Part-Time Students Officer).

WITH THANKS

TO OUR OTHER EXECUTIVE OFFICERS

This has been a very busy and uncertain year, and as such some of our officers were not able to submit their reports on time for the publication of this booklet. We want to acknowledge the hard work of all of our officers this year and say a big thank you!

Lucia Pedroso
Academic Affairs Officer

Katie Saunders & Michael Shand
Working Class Students Officers

Janat Malik
Environment Officer

Emma Masing & Tara Bhat
Wxmens Officers

Jake Isaac
International Officer

Josh Mock
LGBTQIA+ Officer

Heleena Pankhurst
People of Colour Officer

Dideolu Olufelo
Postgraduate Research Officer

Mohammed Malainine
Postgraduate Taught Officer

Emma Thackwray & Alex Allen
Sports Officers

Lizzy Cox & Victor Max Smith
Trans* & Gender Identity Officers

STAFF TEAM REPORT



STAFF TEAM REPORT

2020/21

The SU staff team are here to support and facilitate the running of the organisation. We do things like administer processes and provide the services and functions of the Union.

Anna: General Manager. The senior staff member at SOAS SU, oversees the operations of the Union, makes sure we're doing what students want us to do effectively and within the resources we have. Supports the staff team and officer teams. Is accountable to SOAS SU's elected Trustee Board.

Kai: Finance & Office Manager. Looks after the SU's money, supports the finance processes and expenses payments for student groups, makes sure our staff and bills get paid, and keeps records of our money.

Khaled: Commercial Services Manager: Responsible for running the Snack Shop, online merch shop and the Bar

Susanna: Advice & Welfare Caseworker: provides support, advice and guidance to students facing difficulties during their SOAS studies

Lucia: Black Student Support Coordinator: provides support and representation for Black students, runs events and activities to bring Black students together, and amplifies Black student voices to SOAS.

Antonia: Representation & Research Coordinator: Runs the Student Reps system, providing training and support to the students who represent your views in your department. Supports the student officers with research and information for campaigns and lobbying the School.

Jesse: Activities & Events Coordinator: supports our student groups, societies and sports teams with everything from registration, to sports fixtures and training, and room bookings. Helps student groups to grow & develop.

Fred: SOAS Radio Manager: run SOAS Radio & production company, providing opportunities for students to get involved in media and audio recording, produces audio content for podcasts and radio shows.

Jack: Governance, Comms & Sustainability Coordinator: keeps students in the know about what's going on in SOAS SU, runs our democratic procedures like UGMs and Elections, supports our environmental campaigning and helps the SU to operate sustainably.

End of Year Report

20-21 has, unsurprisingly, been an unusual and challenging year for us. We started the academic year hopeful that we might see some of the year on campus, but it became clear that this wasn't going to happen and it's been an almost entirely 'online' year. We've been able to open our snack shop on campus, some of our Sports Teams, and student groups have been able to carry out some in-person activities as well as some occasional outside events and campaigns activity on campus towards the end of the year. Our team has been working from home, like many of our student members, and from December the majority of the team has been on partial furlough leave in order to manage our finances and recover our previous years' losses. We have continued to run our core functions as a Students' Union, and in some areas have been busier than ever.

Key areas of Success and Impact

Advice & Support: We've provided one-to-one support through our advice caseworker Susanna, our Black Students Support Coordinator Lucia and the full and part-time officers. A lot of the work has been focused on supporting with mitigating circumstances procedures, facilitating students accessing SOAS services, and providing welfare support for students facing more complex and difficult circumstances than ever. The levels of mental health distress, bereavement, stress and anxiety have of course been of significant concern this year.

Representation: This was our first year establishing the new student reps system, working in partnership with SOAS' Student Experience & Engagement team. We've had high levels of engagement from student representatives and they have been a crucial part of the raising the student voice and improving student experience this year. The Reps are volunteers that contribute many hours to SOAS, in particular in many departments this year Reps have been central to creating student community. We're looking forward to continuing with this successful project next year and engaging more with departments and Teaching & Learning staff to increase the impact.

Online Presence: We've increased our online activity, including an online freshers fair, welcome week events, and liberation history month events. We've been a very 'on campus' based Union, reliant on physical presence and our spaces, so this has been a big shift for us – we can see the benefits of accessibility and being able to engage with people across the globe, and we'll be carrying that learning forward into next year & beyond. We delivered our key governance and democracy functions online, including UGM's and elections.

Union Development: We've made major steps towards incorporating the Students' Union, taking the decision through our democratic and governance decision-making and make progress on the necessary administrative work, which will give us firm foundations for the future. We have made improvements to our financial reporting processes and put in place a short term recovery plan for the SU which will take us through the next year and move us beyond crisis management into 'business as usual', even if 'usual' will look very different in the future.

FINANCIAL REPORT 2019/20



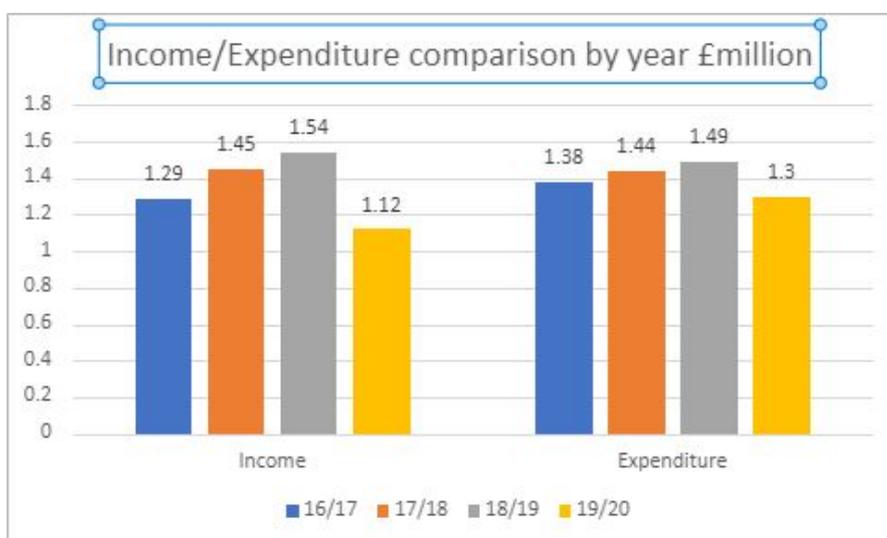
FINANCIAL REPORT

2019/20

SOAS Students' Union has existed in various forms for nearly 100 years, and became a charity 11 years ago. You can find our accounts going back to 2009/10 [on our website](#). As a registered charity we have to produce and publish financial information every year in the form of accounts. These accounts must be audited by external experts and submitted to the Charity Commission who regulate us. Part of the responsibilities of the SU Trustee Board that you elect is to oversee our finances, and publish these accounts. Our audited accounts are published online demonstrating that we use all our resources on our charitable purposes – the aims that we set out when we established the charity. We send our audited accounts to SOAS as the governing body of SOAS (their Board of Trustees) has a responsibility under the Education Act to make sure we're using our resources for the benefit of SOAS students. All of that means that we use our resources carefully, our finances are transparent and there are assurances that what we do is in the interests of SOAS students, our members.

The accounts for each financial year are published during the following year, as it takes time to close the accounts, do the audit and publish the report. The audit involves the auditors checking through our paperwork, like till receipts, invoices, society expense claims so that they can say with confidence what is in our books matches up with reality – this is why we require receipts and invoices when clubs and societies claim expenses for example. That means that this finance report relates to our accounts from August 1st 2019 – July 31st 2020. They were published in March 2021. You can read the full accounts and annual report for 19/20 that this report relates to [on our website](#)

This first chart shows the overall income and expenditure of the Students' Union over the past 4 years. The previous two years the Students' Union was able to bring in some surplus (the income was more than the expenditure) which enables us to save up money to spend on expensive projects for the benefit of our members. Unsurprisingly, 19/20 took us back to a deficit year, meaning that we spent more money than we brought in. This was not what we had planned in our budget at the beginning of the year, but this was the impact of the Covid pandemic hitting in the middle of the year.

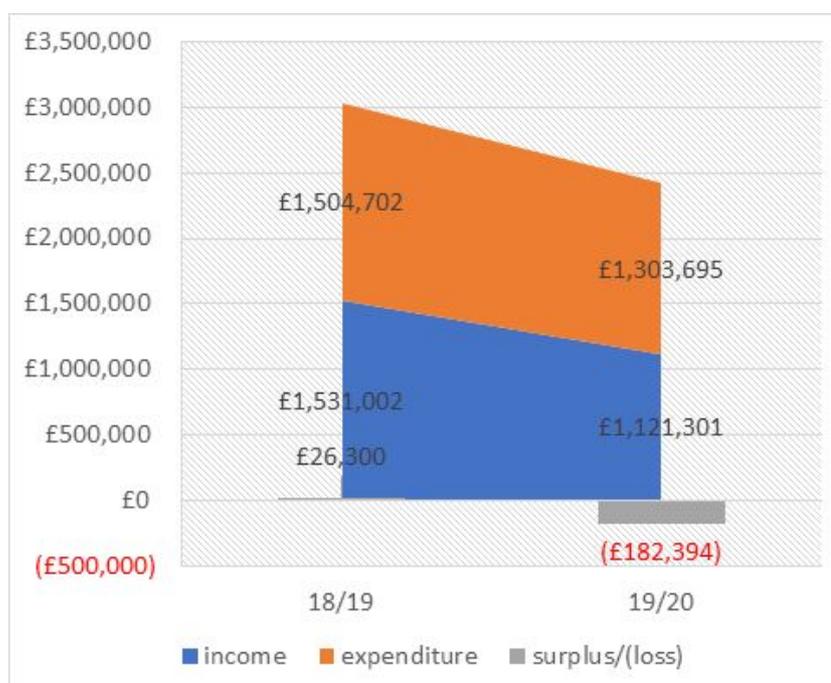


As a charity the SU cannot make ‘profit’ and we don’t have shareholders or anyone that can privately benefit from this income. We have a Reserves Policy, which is an expectation of the Charity Commission, and it is reviewed regularly by the SU’s Trustee Board. Our policy says that we should keep the equivalent of 3 months of our running costs in our reserves, held safely in a savings account. This means that we are able to fulfil any obligations like debts and winding down costs like redundancy payments in the event of the enforced closure of SOAS SU. Up until 19/20 we had healthy reserves and had been saving these in the hopes of making big improvements to the SU Bar. In the end we had to use all of these cash reserves to cover the costs and impact of the Covid pandemic. This is in part what reserves are designed for, and the good financial health of the SU, with prudent decisions made keeping money in our reserves meant we were able to get through the year without any cuts to services or jobs.

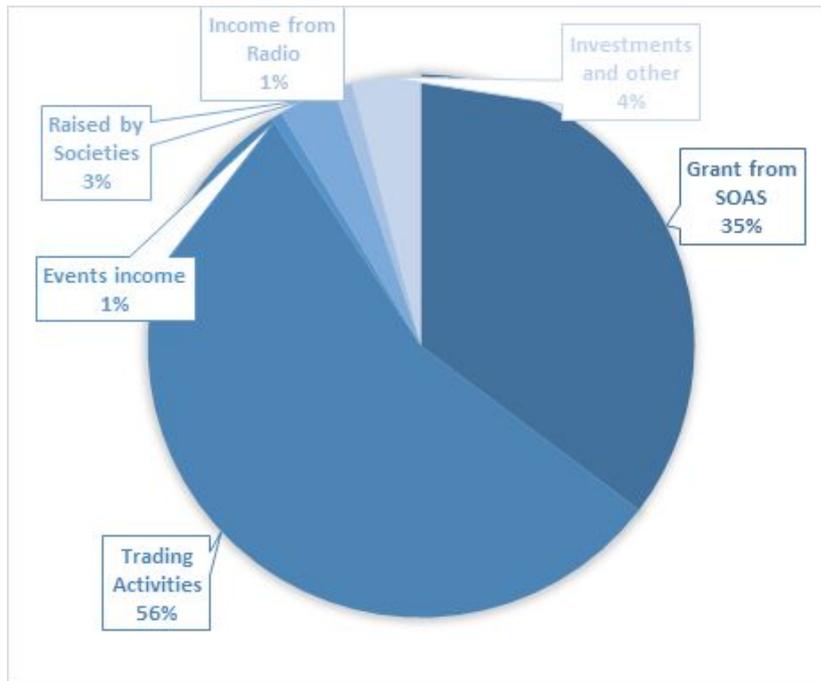
INCOME

The other thing it’s good to understand about our finances is that we have two main sources of income, grant funding from SOAS, and income from our commercial activities (mainly the Bar and the Snack Bar). The funding that comes from SOAS is largely ‘restricted’ – given to us for a specific purpose. The income raised through our commercial activities is ‘unrestricted’, this is where our reserves comes from, which allows the us to have more control and choice about how this money is spent.

In 19/20 SOAS provided SOAS SU with £395k in grant funding, plus the cost of employing the four full time Co-Presidents and the General Manager. The SU supplements this with income we generate ourselves, which covers support costs, overheads, salaries for 7 staff members, running costs of the bar, shop and radio. In 19/20 the Union generated £690k through our commercial services and radio, and societies raised £37k for their own activities. As you can see from the chart below our total income and outgoings were lower than the previous year, due to the impact of the Covid pandemic and closure of spaces.



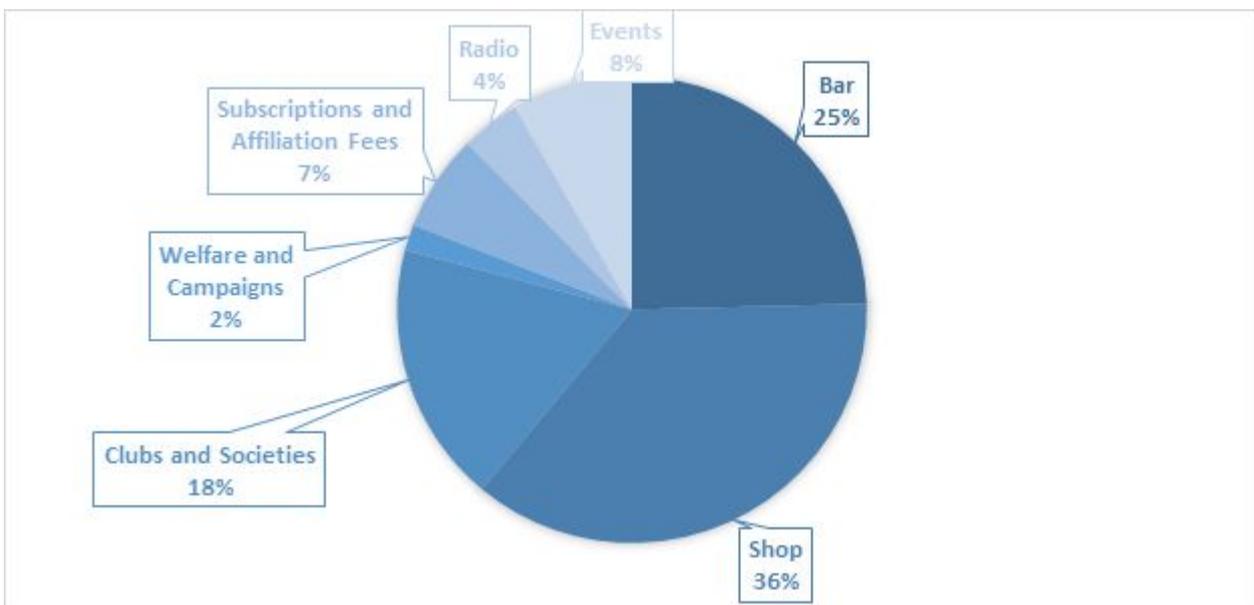
The chart below shows the split of where our income comes from.



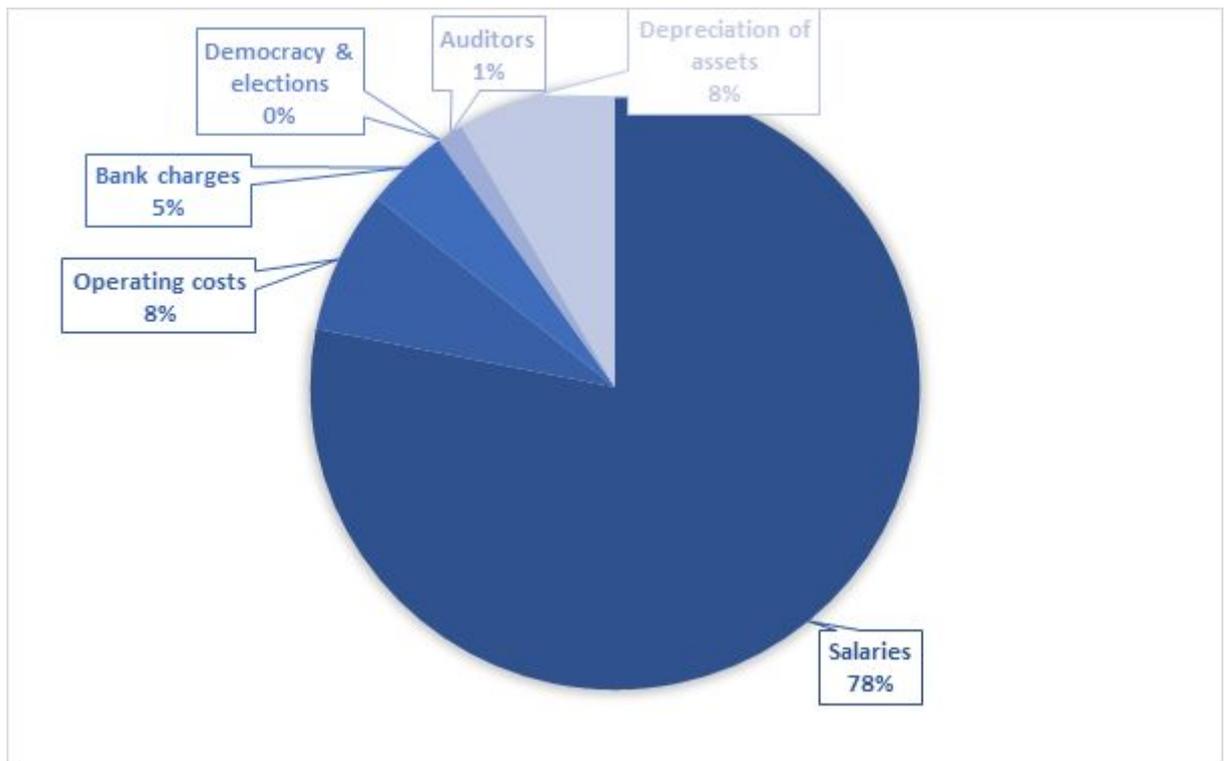
EXPENDITURE

In 19/20 the SU spent £1.3m. 66% is spent on direct costs (money spent on purchasing products to sell, funding the goes directly to students, student groups, events for students etc) and 34% on support costs (money spent on running the organisation, salaries for staff, administration and overheads like IT).

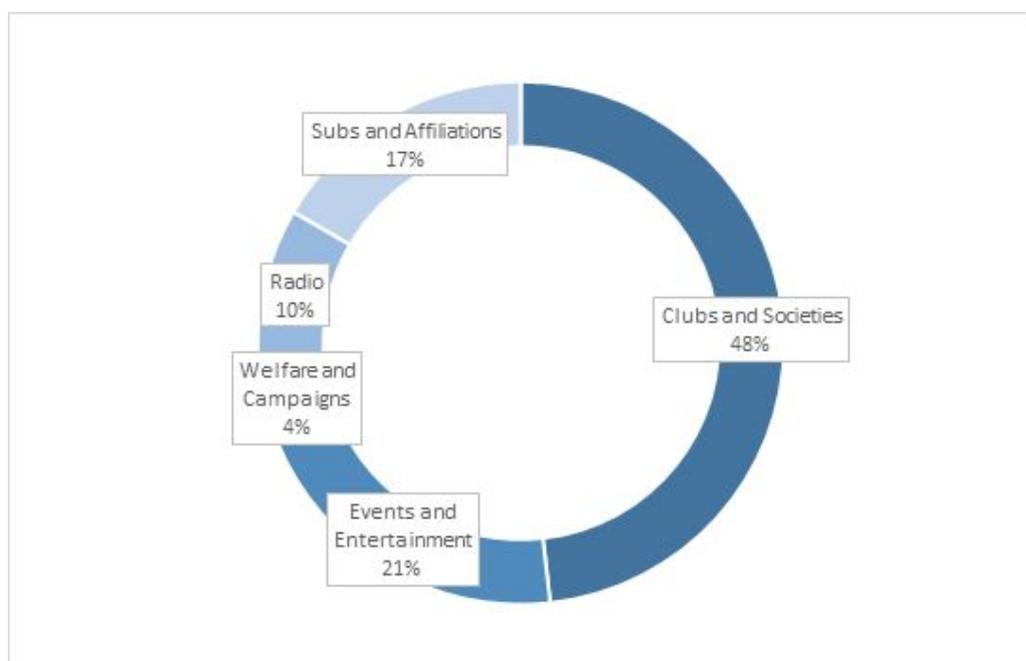
The chart below breaks down the expenditure on the functions and activities of the SU in 19/20



The chart below breaks down the expenditure on support costs in 19/20. This shows that the majority of support costs are on staff salaries.



The chart below shows how our grant is spent on the charitable activities of the SU.



FINANCIAL HEALTH OF SOAS SU

19-20: SOAS Students' Union had been in good financial health for sometime and the accounts from 18/19 showed that we'd continued to manage our finances well. The importance of careful money management and building reserves can be seen when we had a year like 2020. Our Trustees took the decision to close the SU trading services and spaces during picketing hours in solidarity with the UCU and Unison industrial action. This meant our Snack Bar and Bar were closed and our income was affected. This decision was made before the Covid pandemic was known as a risk, and made based on the reasonable assumption that it would only have a small impact on our income for the year. Sadly it was almost immediately followed by closure and lockdown. As this report is about our finances we're talking about the financial impact here, however we cannot omit that the impact of the pandemic was so much deeper, and many of our members have lost loved ones, have missed out on their student experience, missed opportunities to meet, celebrate and organize together through the SU, and we must recognise this impact too.

We worked hard to continue to provide an SU for our members during lockdown and closure on campus. This meant that although we furloughed our commercial staff we kept our charity staff team working from home delivering our support services. We had additional expenditure on online platforms and digital events to tackle isolation. Being closed on campus did not mean we were able to reduce costs in our charitable services areas.

20-21: Alongside SOAS we had hoped and planned for a year that was less impacted by Covid than it turned out. In the end our bar has remained closed for the whole year, and our snack shop was able to open in term 3, but as campus has been so quiet this is not generating any significant income and we've opened in order to provide a service on campus since SOAS have closed their catering services. SOAS provided us with a grant to support this cost. Since December our staff team (other than the General Manager and Co-Presidents) have been on partial furlough and we've focused on the key delivery areas. We are expecting to have a break-even budget at the end of the year as we have worked hard to ensure we do not have another deficit year, and have been able to plan better to manage costs knowing about the risk of the pandemic this year.

