

Officer Report

David East, Co-President Democracy & Education

“Farewell! God knows when we shall meet again.” - Juliet, Act 4.3

As the clouds float, my thoughts are of you, travelling far away,

In the sunset, I think of you, my old friend.

I wave you away from here

As the horses separate us with a whinnying cry. - Li Bai, “Sending off a Friend”

What a year! As ever at SOAS, there have been ups, downs, protests, parties, strikes and sometimes all of the above on the same day. With this being the first year in these new sabbatical roles, we've had to feel our way through our responsibilities and how we fit together as a team. Here's a report of some of the big things that I've been working on this year, both in the internal workings of the Union and the education you receive at SOAS.

Educational Priorities

This year has seen positive movement on four Educational Priorities (see the report on Educational Priorities 2013/14 for more information):

- **Encourage greater use of the BLE as a learning tool**
 - SOAS has purchased a full site license for the lecture capture technology Panopto, meaning that all lecturers and lecture rooms will now have the ability to record lectures and upload them to the BLE.
- **Schoolwide implementation of exam feedback**
 - The school has agreed the need for a formal policy for one-to-one feedback on exam scripts, and one should be drafted at some point during the next academic session. This means that you will be able to sit down with a lecturer and go over your exam transcript if you want to know why you got the mark you were given.
- **More frequent and more transparent student evaluation of courses**
 - The SEC working group has created a shorter, more concise questionnaire for students to give their opinions on their courses. The mechanisms for the collection of data and publication of results will be discussed over the next academic year.
- **Greater support for Graduate Teaching Assistants**
 - A set of guidelines for mentoring Graduate Teaching Assistants has been agreed.

Online democracy

With the adoption of a new online platform for the soasunion.org website, we now have the ability to hold online elections and referenda. This year, we held our first electronic elections, administered through tablets in the foyer, which resulted in a quicker and more accurate count as well as an easier voting process for year abroad students.

Record-keeping

We now have a policy book and record-keeping system for UGM policies going back to academic year 2011-2012, plus an accessible constitution and schedules on our website. Now when people say 'I think we have policy against that', you can actually figure out if that's true.

Referenda

Earlier in the year we had a referendum on whether to rename the JCR after certain figures past and present, and you overwhelmingly voted to keep it as it is. Fair enough. And 97% of you voted to keep the University of London Union democratically run by students.

Resits

From next academic year, all non-final-year students will be able to sit September resits if their exam mark is too low to pass. Previously this was restricted to first-years only.

It has been my honour to serve as your co-president, and I pass the torch on to the capable hands of David Suber, who has been Academic Affairs officer for the past year. Thanks very much to my co-presidents Johann Barbé and Leah Edwards for their tireless work and support, and to the other Union staff who have helped us through the year!

David