

# Covid-19 Critical Response Group Report 3

8<sup>th</sup> April 2020

Anna Dodridge (General Manager)

## Background & Context

Covid-19 has been declared a pandemic and a public health emergency. The UK continues to be in a state of 'lockdown' with any travel and movement restricted to necessity. The pandemic is thought to be at its 'peak' in the UK at this point. The impact on the economy is becoming real, and predictions for the future of Higher Education are grim. It is thought that student numbers will drastically reduce for 20/21, and that international student numbers are likely to decrease by at least 75%.

Since the previous report (25<sup>th</sup> March) SOAS SU has been working remotely for around 3 weeks, in addition to the week of [REDACTED] prior weeks of industrial action it's now been 8 weeks since SOAS SU has been working in 'normal' conditions. SOAS confirmed [REDACTED] the 31<sup>st</sup> March that they would keep their buildings closed until at least 21<sup>st</sup> June, consequently meaning SOAS SU remains closed for at least this period.

## Updates

### Representation

There have been a series of decisions and communications from SOAS in relation to exams and assessment. The Officers have been involved in gathering and presenting student views as part of these decisions, including attending Executive Board, you can see the consultation results and presentation [in full here](#). We had responses from over 1000 students.

Valeria & Maxine attended SOAS Board of Trustees meeting, and presented a paper from us which included the impact of C-19, a report on our elections, and an update on our financial accounts audit. It was agreed in the BoT meeting that SOAS would offer some support to the Union in relation to our financial management and governance.

Youssra & Anna stopped attending SOAS' daily Crisis Response meetings, as these were now focused on day to day operations which were no longer a priority for us. SOAS Executive Board has set up 7 work streams focused on preparing for 20/21, and we will have representation in the relevant groups – Online Learning & Pedagogy, Marketing, Recruitment & Admissions, Wellbeing & Students.

## Union Operations

Thankfully, we've had no further reports of c-19 sickness from anyone in our staff team (student and non-student staff), and staff who have had sick leave have been returning to work and doing well. The team have been working on improving the information on our website & communicating with students. We're now in the Easter vacations, and our normal student enquiries have stayed pretty quiet – there is not much happening yet in terms of student group activities for example.

## Decisions

The CRG were asked to consider a number of decisions in relation to furlough leave for our commercial staff team. We have 29 student staff who work on variable hours contracts in the bar and shop. We also have a Bar Manager on a fixed 20 hour/week contract, and the Commercial Manager who is a non-student member of staff on a permanent contract.

The costs for all of these staff are paid for through our commercial income. We are forecasting around £350k decrease in commercial income this year, following industrial action closures and closure due to C-19, until at least the Summer vacation. This is approximately a third of our annual income. It is clear that without this income we cannot afford to retain our staff, and would be forced to make redundancies.

The government have confirmed a Covid-19 Job Retention Scheme (CJRS), with the aim of avoiding redundancies caused by temporary closure of businesses. Organisations can claim 80% of wages, NI and pension contributions (up to stated maximum amounts) through the scheme where they put staff on 'furlough leave' meaning no work can be done but wages can continue to be paid. The details have not been fully released yet, and the scheme has been confirmed until May 31<sup>st</sup>.

Following legal advice, the following recommendations were put forward & decisions made by the CRG

Recommendation	Decision
Put 29 student staff from commercial department on Furlough Leave	Yes – from 20 <sup>th</sup> April
Furlough Leave will be confirmed until May 31 <sup>st</sup> (the current end date of the CJRS), with a review point when the gvmt confirms any extension to the scheme	Yes – review and inform staff no later than 2 weeks before May 31 <sup>st</sup>
Confirm the contract end date as either May 31 <sup>st</sup> (current confirmed end of CJRS), June 12 <sup>th</sup> (original end of Term 3 and original contract end date) or June 26 <sup>th</sup> (extended end of Term 3)	Suspend this decision and re-visit no later than 2 weeks before May 31 <sup>st</sup>
Offer 80% of wages & contributions in line with CJRS	Yes

Put Bar Manager on Furlough Leave until May 31 <sup>st</sup> with review point when government confirms any extension to the CJRS	Delay this decision and make alongside Commercial Manager decision
Put Commercial Manager on Furlough Leave until May 31 <sup>st</sup> with review point when government confirms any extension to the CJRS	Delay this decision until relevant information on CM's salary breakdown is available. To review next week.

