



# Covid-19 Critical Response Group Report 2

25<sup>th</sup> March 2020

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## Background & Context

Covid-19 has been declared a pandemic and a public health emergency. The UK has entered a state of 'lockdown' and global travel is being closed down. The impact on global & UK economy is not well understood at this time, although it's clear there will be a very significant impact.

SOAS have had less than 10 reported confirmed student cases, and 2 reported confirmed cases. Testing to confirm covid-19 is being [restricted to serious cases only](#), meaning it's very difficult to know how many cases there are within an organisation. SOAS, along with every other non-essential organisation has been closed down, with all activity happening remotely where possible.

Since the previous report (15<sup>th</sup> March) SOAS SU has moved to entirely remote working. We continue to have responsibilities as representatives, advice and support providers, services provider and as an employer. We're beginning to move beyond the 'crisis management' stage and into defining our new 'normal'.

SOAS & SOAS SU current published decision about closure applies until April 20<sup>th</sup> (beginning of term 3). It is inevitable that this will be extended, decisions which will happen over the next week. At this stage we need to be planning for disruption throughout term 3 and impact through the summer and into next year at least.

## Updates

### Representation

Youssra & Anna have been attending the daily SOAS Covid-19 Critical Incident team meetings, these reduced to once daily this week (week beg 23<sup>rd</sup> March). Officers & staff members have joined the Student Support, Mitigating Circumstances and the Assessment working groups reporting to the CIR meeting. Youssra & Maxine attended SOAS Executive Board to share student views on assessment and exams decisions which are being confirmed this week. We had a very good response to our call for views on this.

Valeria & Oscar have been working on supporting students in halls of residence, whether they choose to stay or leave. This is a growing national campaign, involving NUS, university directors, UUK, the Russell Group, University Alliance among others.

### Union Operations

The team are already familiar with remote working having had a good chance to practice during the strikes. As it becomes more likely that we'll be closed beyond 20<sup>th</sup> April the needs relating to remote working will change. I've started this conversation with SOAS, who have said they'll be looking at this further next week. We're facing the same

issues as students are - we have staff with shit laptops, bad wifi, nowhere suitable to work. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

We're managing to carry out our core functions just about. We'll look specifically at finances in a separate paper, so I won't include that information here.

### Elections

The decision to continue elections was made at the last possible moment, and at the time it seemed that there would at least be access to the campus. During the first day of elections (16<sup>th</sup>) it became clear that we were making very rapid progress towards closing the SOAS site completely. The situation changed significantly every day. With some very considerable levels of hard work we managed to make the relevant changes needed to run elections entirely online. There were candidates for almost every position. Turnout was approx. 7% of eligible student voters. Our usual turnout is 20-25%.

We've had the initial report from the Deputy Returning Officer, which will be shared with the Trustee Board and include information such as demographic data on candidates and voters.

We had a few queries relating to technical problems with the voting system, everyone who contacted the elections clerk as instructed had their issue resolved, or was given full information to resolve their issue and didn't respond.

We had \* elections complaints. The DRO considered all of these complaints and none were upheld.

The DRO received one complaint, which we determined was outside of our elections complaints remit, and was considered by the GM under our regular complaints process.

We're looking at the situation across other SU's. It's difficult to compare due to different dates, student engagement with elections, how 'online' union elections already are. Overall it's clear that elections were impacted significantly across most SU's. Local Government cancelled their elections altogether, however, we took the view that we have no choice as the alternative is a students' union with no officers or trustees next year.