



Executive Committee Meeting Minutes

28th October 2020

12pm - 2pm

Chair: Roza Atac

Agenda

1. Officer Check In
2. SU Autumn Elections
3. Disability History Month
4. Covid Planning
5. Feedback on the Learning, Teaching & Student Experience strategy paper from Claire 2021 - 2025
6. Responding to the National Crisis in HE (privatisation, workshops, solidarity statement with rent strikers around the country)
7. EiE Letter Update
8. AOB

Apologies: Alex Allen, Emma Thackwray

In attendance: Roza Atac, Sabrina Shah, Yasmin Elsouda, Hasan Zakria, Josh Mock, Oscar Ward, Sohane Yahya, Sara Lloyd-Knibbs, Mohmed Malainine, Rima Koley, Lucia Pedroso, Ella Spencer, Felix Henson, Katie Saunders, Michael Shand, Victor Max Smith

1. Officer Check In

Roza: *Introduced the SU Safer Spaces Policy.* Today is a formal meeting because we have a lot of points to cover, but we don't intend these meetings to be as formal going forward.

Hasan: Most of us ran for these roles in March but we're obviously in a different place now than we were back then. If you don't feel like you are able to achieve your manifesto anymore don't be afraid to speak to us and ask for support - we have to be understanding of the new environment we're in. Being online may feel distant but we're a team and we want you to feel comfortable approaching us with anything. Take care of our mental health. These meetings should be about uplifting and supporting each other.

Officer Check Ins

Sara: She/her. New Mature Students Officer. I've been out of education for 5 years but many people I've spoken to have been out for even longer. Mature students can often be overlooked and will be under a lot of stress in these current circumstances.

Mohamed: New Postgraduate Taught Officer. Came back to studying this year after 8 years working. The students I live with in accommodation encouraged me to run for this position as we are in a difficult and unusual situation, and the university hasn't put much effort into supporting us. We need to push the university to provide us with innovative ideas to try and make our lives easier while studying in these circumstances.

Rima: New Entertainments Officer. I nominated myself because with everyone being all over the world right now entertainment is the only social space we have.

Roza: Oscar and I are working on accommodation with the Student Advice and Wellbeing team. We're thinking of providing support through themes with a mental health counsellor and the chaplaincy, e.g. how to deal with loneliness. Still in the beginning phases - we're working out how it could be run but it's very exciting. The sabbs are meeting Adam Habib later today if there's anything you want us to bring up. I'm also starting to look into how racism complaints are raised in the SU and the School - meeting with Anna and the SOAS complaints team. If anyone is interested in taking part in this work please let me know!

Ella: Overwhelmed recently with moving house. Generally keeping up with the campaigns - Trans Dignity and Justice 4 Workers. With J4W the focus is getting new people involved as lots of the most active members have left SOAS recently. Don't want the knowledge and experience to be lost. Held an event last week which was good but low attendance and we got Zoom bombed. Trying to think of new ways to engage with students, especially first years. Would like to support Disability History Month.

Lucia: She/her. Been quite busy academically. Last week I met with Antonia Bright to talk about student representatives - how I can help with rep training. Also emailing lots of people about events for Disability History Month.

Oscar: He/him. Dislike online study but having a good week. Working with Roza on accommodation support and mental health. Trying to keep in touch and stay on the pulse of accommodation. Covid cases seem to have plateaued in halls, but expecting a spike on Halloween as it seems people are planning parties. Raising issues with EIE.

Victor: He/him/they/them. Ran for this position to support Lizzy but thinking of quitting as quite stressed.

Felix: They/them. Disabled Students & Carers Officer. Planning Disability History Month.

Yasmin: She/her. Attended SOAS' Resources & Planning Committee (SOAS' financial committee) where they discussed all their new strategies. Been trying to stay on accommodation chats - Paul Robeson seems to be more calm than Dinwiddy. Trying to stay in the loop with the School's covid planning - they've changed their mitigating circumstances process but will address this later.

Sohane: She/her. Finishing Black History Month. Event tomorrow: 'Paradox of Anti-Black Racism in Social Justice Spaces'. Trying to organise a Black student bingo night. Sending emails to try and host a Disability History Month event on hashimoto disease and how it affects afro caribbean women.

Katie: She/her. Trying to note organisations that offer job placements to people from lower socio-economic backgrounds and people of colour.

Michael: He/him. Mostly trying to get to grips with the role. Trying to set up a network of interested people from working class backgrounds

Sabrina: She/her. Working on student reps with Yasmin and Lucia. Reading lots of Academic Board papers. Planning how to host online UGMs with Jack. Lots of SOAS board and committees happening - speaking to the Chairs to try and get more of Exec on these!

Josh: He/him. Working to make faith spaces more welcoming to lgbt people on campus. Meeting Claudette [SOAS Multi-Faith Advisor] later to discuss this.

Hasan: He/him. Hosting University Challenge tryouts next week. Running Exec Events & Social Media training later this week. Meeting SOAS Lonely Hearts Club to discuss tackling social isolation and loneliness.

2. SU Autumn Elections

Sabrina: We recently held our Autumn elections. 2 people ran for Entertainments Officer, 2 people ran for Mature Students Officer and 3 people ran for Postgraduate Taught Officer. No one ran for Postgraduate Research Officer or the Research Students Association Committee roles. 152 people voted - more than in 2019 or 2018! We received no complaints and only 2 people raised issues voting, which were resolved immediately.

Would everyone be happy if we held a by-election to elect a new Postgraduate Research Officer? [A: Yes]

Sohane: Some research students had issues enrolling, which may explain why they didn't run

Lucia: We need better comms for the election as many people weren't aware it was happening

Sabrina: We did have an issue with the SU mailing list at the start of the year and had to send SOAS our comms to send out for us - this limited our ability to send comms out.

3. Disability History Month

Hasan: Sohane has created a liberation month document. Been working with Felix, with a deadline of October 31st for people to update on their planned events. Should we update via Teams call or email?

Sohane: Learning from Black History Month, a Teams call would be best!

Felix: Disability History Month runs from mid-way through November to mid-way through December. There's been lots of great ideas generated and Exec have seemed really united on this.

Agreed to integrate Exec catch up on DHM events into Friday's Events & Social Media training session.

Felix: The theme of this year's DHM is 'access', and all officers are trying to relate this theme to their students groups to plan something for the month.

Officers ran through any currently planned DHM events.

4. Covid Planning

Yasmin: As we aren't on campus the SU is normally most visible in person and we're a bit worried about losing some of the connection we have with students as we previously didn't focus our resource into our online presence. We're trying to up engagement and connection with students. In covid planning we're trying to make sure we're actively communicating with students. As mentioned, we had issues with our mailing lists at the start of term, and we would have liked to have sent more solidarity statements and emails but were unable given SOAS' strict comms schedule.

Approx 70% of our income comes from our shop and bar. Kahled is in talks with the Senate House coffee shop for us to take this over to earn money, and we're trying to promote our online store (normally only really sold in person).

When thinking about returning to campus there are lots of risk assessments we'd need to complete - we wouldn't be able to do this quickly. Anna has been doing work organising what type of risk assessments we need, and we're in the early stages of planning what this risk assessment would look like for us to be able to return to campus.

In the School's Exec meeting last week they decided all teaching this year will be online, including assessments. This hasn't been communicated to students yet, but will be ASAP. This is aiming to help students decide whether or not to come to London. The new mitigating circumstances policy aims to incorporate covid-19. SOAS is also moving forward with welfare package provision for students in accommodation, and a click and collect service is almost set up. The school seems serious about supporting students in accommodation, but people in accommodation seem scared to tell the School if they have covid-19 in case of any negative consequences.

[Since this meeting of the SU Exec Committee there have been changes in a National lockdown and further decisions at SOAS which mean this information has been misunderstood. It is correct that all teaching and assessment will be accessible and available online for the rest of the year, the SOAS campus remains open, and academic activities will continue to be held on campus.]

Hasan: Sports have been allowed to meet in person as they're regulated by a national governing body. This is the same across all UK universities. They can't play sports unless every member has bought a membership and they use a track and trace system. The venue has to be covid secure too.

Society activity has been suspended since March. We're working on risk assessments so we'll be prepared for when in person activity can happen. We've asked all societies not to do any in person activity. Societies have been receptive to being told not to hold in person events. We're also speaking to the School to make sure all societies will have access to Zoom.

Lucia: Would like to be kept in the loop more about meetings with the School so we can prepare questions for you to take with you.

Yasmin: We can do that. We don't actually sit on the School's Exec Board although part time officers do sit on the Academic Board. In the past the sabbatical officers on the board would read the documents for the meeting and pass on points to the appropriate officers for discussion, as the meeting documents could be over 150 pages which is too much to expect a part time officer to read. Our RPC meeting was just an introduction, as is the meeting with Adam Habib later. We aren't making decisions without you.

[In response to a question in the chat about the recent covid cases reported on the SOAS Netball team] As with all sports teams, netball has a covid officer. They reported to Anna, as Anna sits on the School's covid operational committee. It became clear the two members contracted covid in their personal lives, not in a game. The team has since stopped training and everyone is isolating.

Sara: What can we do to pre-empt the upcoming autumn deadlines, and the fact students may struggle for many reasons associated with covid (e.g. mental health)?

Yasmin: The School's new mitigating circumstances policy lets students submit up to 10 days before a deadline. We can discuss the new policy more offline.

Sohane: Can the SU put out comms on Instagram about the new process and link the NHS self certifying form?

Action Point - SU to put out comms on MC process

Discussion had around SU paying for doctor's notes needed for mitigating circumstances.

5. Feedback on the Learning, Teaching & Student Experience strategy paper from Claire 2021 - 2025

Sabrina: The LT&SE strategy is a 5 year strategy SOAS is working on to plan where they want all of these areas to be in SOAS in 5 years. It's a very basic strategy. The School don't want us to share this but we need input ASAP. This is only a cover doc - not the full strategy. We raised points such as decolonisation not being its own point in the strategy, but I was outnumbered in the meeting, so it's important to get your feedback and comments too. Please message me to get involved.

A discussion was had around sharing any documents before Exec meetings for Exec to be able to read over - Exec preferring to have documents and be told they don't have to read them but having the opportunity to do so, rather than simply having the points relayed to them. It was discussed that this isn't possible for all documents, the Exec space isn't set up to discuss documents even if they were shared ahead of time, and the sabbs were conscious not to overwhelm Exec with reading.

6. Responding to the National Crisis in HE (privatisation, workshops, solidarity statement with rent strikers around the country)

Yasmin: We're looking to hold workshops about what our position is in HE during its marketisation and privatisation. It's been 10 years since the £9k tuition fees came into place, and it would be powerful to link up with other SUs to hold a discussion on this.

Ella: It's a key moment to talk about HE!

Josh: I don't think we should be thinking about planning more workshops until we've resolved issues with EiE and then plan workshops accordingly following that.

Yasmin: Yes, I agree. I would say however that EiE is completely different from a discussion of marketisation, and so we can't compare the two.

7. EiE Letter Update

Yasmin: Context: A collective letter was made by ex-Enough is Enough facilitators and students addressing how Enough is Enough is being run this year. We have scheduled a meeting on Friday to discuss how EiE was planned to run this year which everyone is welcome to attend.

Yasmin provided context into how the decision to run the Enough is Enough consent training as an online self-study module was decided. The decision was made in April, before the current sabbatical team started, and in forming the content the sabbatical team referred to appropriate information and resources. They acknowledge they could have done more to communicate the decisions with the Exec Committee, and want to let people know they don't have to write a letter to communicate with them.

A larger discussion was had around the implementation of EiE this academic year. It was felt by the people who signed the letter that the knowledge of facilitators was overlooked in creating the EiE course this year, there was disappointment that the self-study module did not make clear what the project road map was and was also not mandatory (as EiE has been in the past), that conversations around consent have not been attempted to be had during Freshers (as they typically are), and that their input in previous years was not appreciated as they were not contacted. A letter was chosen as they felt the level of grievance was quite serious. The sabbatical officers explained the challenge in organising EiE around covid, and that this conversation could be had in more detail in the upcoming formal meeting. Points were also raised about the lack of inclusion of disability and SGBV in the module, and the safeguarding of survivors in having to view this content alone at home.

8. AOB

A discussion was had around the conduct of the meeting and the plans for meetings going forward. Multiple members of the meeting expressed concerns over the tone of the meeting, and potential confrontation and upset felt.

Sohane: Trans Day of Remembrance is coming up on November 20th and we need to plan something for this. I'm going to reach out to the Trans* & Gender Identity Officers.

It was decided that the next Exec meeting will be held in 2 weeks time, during Reading Week, and Jack will send out invites following the meeting.