

SOAS SU Trustee Board meeting 10.03.21

Minutes & Actions

In attendance: Anna (GM & Clerk), Emma T, Felix, Lucia, Sara, Sabrina (Chair), Yasmin, Victor, Ella, Hasan, Michael, Josh

Apologies from: Oscar, Roza

Not in attendance: Hisham, Sohane, Jake, Katie, Emma M, Tara, Lizzy, Heleena, Janat, Mohamed, Dideolu, Alex,

	For our Records	ACTIONS
Sabrina	welcomed everyone to the meeting. Reminded of the safer spaces policy & confidentiality of papers.	
Sabrina	We have reached quoracy. Noted apologies. Checked conflict of interests – none.	
Sabrina	Board approved minutes of previous TB. Noted action log. All actions completed, with the exception of the outstanding action to Trustees to complete information & declaration forms.	Outstanding Actions: Trustees to complete information & declaration forms
Decisions		
Sabrina	Paper 1: Plans for Returning to Campus Paper sets out the plans for returning to campus in line with national lockdown restrictions and SOAS return to campus plans. Board were asked to discuss and approved the proposed plan, with a timeline for returning physical activities and services on campus. Sabrina invited comments & questions	
Lucia	Raised concerns about re-opening the bar in the summer and potential losses due to low numbers on campus. Can we plan some events in order to bring more income into the bar?	
Anna	Would expect to be opening the bar later in the summer. Depends on how many people will be on campus, balancing the finances- the start up costs, the staffing needed to run, costs to set up as covid-safe. We've received some additional funding from SOAS to support us opening up commercial services when circumstances mean we may run at a loss. SOAS are looking at bringing activity onto campus over the summer, such as summer schools. We don't know yet whether/when external people can come onto campus, which will impact our trade. We are planning already around how we can increase trade through our services.	
Emma	Have discussed Sports events with Jesse for later in the year	
Anna	When do we want to allow societies to start doing student-led activities? Under the roadmap the restrictions allow for outside social activity from 26 th April for 6 people. Riskiest area for us re-opening is around student-led activity as we have less control over safety measures. We have achieved this	

	<p>around Sports activities, however there are less Sports groups, and we've already run Sports this year so have measures and procedures set up. However the risk is that lots of societies want to run activities all at once – I don't think it's a high risk as not everyone is back in London and we haven't had many expressions of interest. We need to make sure we're ready, have procedures set up and capacity to support any activity that we allow. The risk to the Board is around making sure activities are done safely.</p> <p>I want to understand whether the Board has a strong view about whether they want us to start society activity as soon as possible, or whether we leave this til later, around mid-May to stagger our re-opening.</p>	
Felix	Not keen on the idea of people turning up to campus so early, or putting on activities that encourages people back onto campus	
Yasmin	We shouldn't come back until SOAS makes a clear announcement about what their plans are. Our risk will depend on SOAS' operations. I would be keen to wait 2 or 3 weeks after that date before we bring society activity back.	
Sara	It's difficult to predict – aware of FT PGT students, this is the only year of study. Students are lonely, and may be keen to meet and socialise, however they may have already decided not to come back. Hard to predict	
Lucia	I feel the plan gives us some flexibility, and we still don't have all the information in order to make decisions about later in the year right now	
Victor	Need to consider student impact and also the impact on staff and cleaners. Return to campus increases the risk to other people. Term 3 isn't a high activity period, and don't feel we will lose out a lot if we keep thing small. I do agree it's a shame for those only studying for a year and not meeting anyone at all. There could be room for some small activities, but not big events	
Sabrina	People are accessing campus, whether or not we tell them to – they're using library and study spaces. This gives us some opportunity to bring in some income when restrictions allow, which opens up some spaces for students to use.	
Sabrina	Took a vote on whether to approve the plan as set out in the paper TB Approved this decision	
Anna	<p>Paper 2: Priorities for the rest of the year</p> <p>I have set out what I think the key priorities are for the SU over the next 18 months. Set out in a 3 stage process – survive to the end of this year, recover from the 2 years of disruptions, developing the Union for the future.</p> <p>I want a steer from the Board about what you feel should be the priorities</p>	
Lucia	In key areas for recovery, we need to prioritise updating our website as I see this as important for how we reach and engage with students	
Anna	I see the website as fitting in with increasing student participation, we have a presentation to look at digital transformation later in the meeting.	Include digital transformation plans and website updates in the

		participation section of the plan.
Sabrina	We need flexibility in the plan because we don't have certainty on our finances and there are some other areas that need priority for funding in the immediate future – gaining financial sustainability is the priority.	
Sabrina	Took a vote on approving the plans set out in the paper. TB approved the paper.	
Anna	Paper 3: UGM motions To ratify the motions as approved by the student body through the UGM. The Board needs to consider the legal, financial and governance impacts of implementing these motions.	
Sabrina	First motion: incorporation. This motion passed. TB ratified the motion.	GM is working with SOAS legal & governance team to get legal advice on status of decision and create new constitution
	Second motion: housing emergency. This motion passed TB ratified the motion	Oscar & Yasmin are taking this motion to Directors Group next week
	Third motion: solidarity with the Uyghur people. This motion passed TB ratified the motion with one abstention	
	Fourth & Fifth motions: Introducing part-time and student parent officers These motions both passed.	
Anna	The implications of these motions that we need to consider. Limited finance implications as we'll need to stretch resources across more officers, I think this is manageable in our current resources. Governance implications – we can do this in the autumn elections, TB will need to consider & decide this. There are implications around the number of trustees we currently have and how many we can have under our constitution, and whether it's suitable for the roles to take on additional trustee responsibilities	
Sara	I think there role descriptions & responsibilities of these roles should be similar to current liberation roles. Autumn seems to be the right election period. I think these roles at the moment should be trustees, however we need to have a conversation about restructuring governance and combining trustee & exec committees	
Felix	Under equality act & social model pregnancy & maternity are protected characteristics.	

	Recognise additional time burdens of these groups, however this is the case for other liberation officers so don't need to treat these positions so differently	
Victor	Agree with discussion around splitting exec and trustee roles – we struggle to recruit to roles, and trustee responsibilities make it less accessible for people who want get involved in the SU, and can exclude marginalised groups	
Anna	Agree we need to look at Trustees & governance/democracy review. It's a large piece of work & there's been resistance in the past to making changes, but my view is that the current structure is not fit for purpose I would recommend that these roles are trustee roles consistent with other roles.	AD, SS, JdF, Sara, Exec: Further conversations with constituents to develop role descriptions for these roles
Lucia	We should include these roles as trustees. Agree we need to do the work around a governance/democracy review in the future. We need to consider about what other demographics of students have representation in the Union – we don't have a black students officer, a MENA student officer or Asian student officer. Who are we giving space to and who are we leaving out	
Sabrina	Yes – we need this work on the governance structures of the Union. It has been difficult to do this work when we're having to fire fight and deal with disruptions, but it's important going forward.	
	TB ratified both motions , with the roles as Trustees and being elected in Autumn	
Anna	Paper 4: approval of Trustee Report for accounts audit. We're required to produce an annual report on our charity and our finances, our performance, our public benefit. The accounts have been audited, and the auditors are happy with our accounts. We publish this to the Charity Commission, publish online and report to SOAS. The report relates to our activities and performance last year, and we need TB to approve they are happy with the contents of the report. TB approved the Report	AD to send report to Auditors, finalise and publish Accounts & report to SOAS and Charity Commission.
Anna	General Manager's Report We are struggling with capacity in the SU. The GM & Co-Presidents are doing a lot of working with SOAS, in committees and working groups around Covid impacts. We also have our staff on partial furlough leave. We are managing to deliver our core activities. A lot of my time is being spent on trying to bring in additional funding and formalise our relationship with SOAS.	
Anna	Finances & Risk Register Noted management accounts for first 6 months, with forecasts. In December we reforecast our budgets, which we discussed at the last Trustee Board. Since then we have increased our income – longer time on furlough scheme (extended to April), and additional £40k grant from SOAS.	

	<p>We have made additional savings through further unexpected reduced activity due to lockdown, and are controlling spending appropriately in line with continued commercial closures.</p> <p>We are expecting some increase to outgoings in term 3 under the agreed plan.</p> <p>My view is that we are controlling our finances and our reforecast budgets for the next 6 months should be manageable without any drastic changes. At the moment, with the additional income we have a healthy amount of cash in bank, however we have a number of areas of expenditure we are aware of, and cash flow may not pick up until later in the year when we know whether or not our commercial outlets will be loss-making, so we need to remain cautious about spending.</p>	
Josh	<p>Raised a concern about cash in the bank, and questioned how low the balance has got</p>	
Anna	<p>At the beginning of this year it dropped to a low level in our current account and savings account, and we are below our current reserves policy. However, this relates to cash flow. Under usual circumstances we have money regularly going in and out of the account through our commercial outlets. At the moment we don't have the same level of cashflow, we receive large lump sums from our block grant funding twice in the year, and we have to make sure we manage the cash flow so that it lasts until the end of the year.</p>	
Anna	<p>Horizon Scanning: SOAS Strategy</p> <p>Discussed the SOAS Strategy timeline and process. Strategy will be approved in May and they will approve 3 years of budget against this – our grant will also be treated in this way so we'll need to submit a 3 year budget by the end of March</p> <p>We need to be aware of the SOAS Strategy and potential impacts and implications for the future of the SU.</p> <p>Key areas:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identity of SOAS – size & shape, increasing student numbers, increasing research focus internationalisation – relationship with global institutions, our approach to decolonising Financial sustainability Institutional community – freedom of speech, fractious relationships & culture Institutional efficiencies – investing in technology, casualised contracts, performance and quality <p>Key impacts for SU:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increase in student numbers & different student profile means different student needs Less space on campus, increased blended & distance learning – we're a very 'campus' based union at the moment What relationship should the SU have with global institutions Competition & opportunities around funding from SOAS, need to be able to show our value for money 	

	<p>Safety of our students, ability of our students to shape our community, opportunity to shape the SOAS culture but also a potential threat to activism</p> <p>Staff morale & performance impacts on student experience</p>	
	Board had a discussion about the strategy & were encouraged as student representatives to participate in the discussions around the strategy	
Josh	<p>Dislike the language used in the strategy. On one hand I understand that SOAS needs money to exist in the current HE environment. SOAS is a special place, students took a risk to come to SOAS, to choose SOAS over other institutions. SOAS may change so much it's a different institution by the time I finish my degree. Students may regret students choosing SOAS. Raised concerns about impact on activism through making SOAS 'unified' Glad that there are conversations about the future of SOAS but I don't feel these are the right priorities – need to be more creative.</p> <p>Wouldn't have chosen SOAS if my current degree was what I had applied for</p>	
Victor	<p>Glad that SOAS is looking at becoming more research focused.</p> <p>Raised concerns about closing down dissent, and enforcing approach to student activism on racism etc. We may have to look outside of SOAS to support student activism – this may make student activism less safe & supported.</p>	
Yasmin	<p>Need to hold SOAS to account. Report on Transformation & Change and the 'Why Did I Come to SOAS' feedback is important to this strategy process. This is not unique to SOAS – Goldsmiths, UAL, Manchester</p> <p>Students are organising around responses to changes in institutions. We can use this opportunity to understand what kind of Union we want to be, and what we need to centre and prioritise as a Union. For example, how do we invest in campaigning at SOAS? National organisations like NUS & FOSIS used to do campaigns training at a national level but this no longer happens, so how can we support as an SU at a local level.</p> <p>The conversations with students about what is important to them and what they want to get out of a university education is changing – focused on getting a job and the future, not what experiences you can have as a student</p>	
Josh	<p>Focus on research – sounds exciting, but lots of universities are saying this because this is where money come in. It puts pressure on staff to bring in a lot of money, and can hinder research because academics have to spend all their time applying for grants. Researchers need the support to get the funding so they can focus on research. We need to hold SOAS to account to set out <i>how</i> they intend to put ideas into action.</p>	
Sabrina	<p>We have asked Adam Habib (SOAS Director) to meet with Exec to hear from student representatives on the Strategy. We also have organised cluster meetings with representatives & an all-student meeting so that we can question and challenge the ideas and priorities for the institution. We want a diversity of opinion in the consultation meetings.</p>	
Lucia	<p>I think we should create a counter strategy as the SU to speak on what the SU priorities are.</p>	

Ella	Funding for decolonising working group has been cut, MoD contract still exists, casualisation maintains institutional racism – feel this is being resisted when it is raised. Needs to be addressed in this strategic consultation, and to hold SOAS to account for this.	
Yasmin	Importance of research is also about position in league tables. Being presented as mutually exclusive from teaching – extracts labour from junior academics, whereas established senior academics have strong international networks which SOAS wants, but those academics rarely teach. SOAS is not investing as much as they should in young researchers. Need to understand the connection between fractionals and research.	
Anna	Helpful conversation in preparation for consultation – from the Exec side of your role this is about how do you influence what goes into the Strategy. From the Trustee perspective of your role it's about understanding what SOAS is planning and what this means for the future of the SU. There is further work we need to do around horizon scanning beyond SOAS looking at upcoming HE policy changes.	
Anna	Digital Transformation Presented on digital transformation: this is an ongoing project that the SU needs to prioritise. Despite being 'online' for over a year we are very behind the necessary changes. This is a change of processes, technology & culture in the organisation. We need to invest in tech and training, we need to make proper use of the systems we do have, and we need to understand the digital systems that support all our areas of work. Key parts of this work relate to accessibility & data protection.	