HR Excellence in Research Award, July 2022

Progress Report – Ten Year Evaluation and Review
SOAS University of London is the leading Higher Education institution in the UK and Europe specialising in the study of Asia, Africa, and the Middle East. The SOAS Research and Knowledge Exchange Strategy 2021-26 and SOAS' Strategic Plan 'Reimagining SOAS for the 21st Century' set an ambitious agenda for SOAS as a research-intensive university concerned with addressing the global issues of our times.

Background
SOAS is a relatively small institution with approximately 50 research-only staff, 235 research and teaching staff, 90 teaching-only staff, and 30 professional services staff with a research remit role. With 410 PGR students, we have a high proportion of research students to undergraduates than most UK higher education institutions. SOAS lost research momentum in the midst of financial crisis and underwent a major reorganisation in 2020. Stewarded by the Pro-Director Research & Enterprise, a strong team of Associate and Departmental Directors of Research has been built in the period 2020-22 and an ambitious new Research and Knowledge Exchange strategy evolved out of a collaborative process of engagement across the institution, re-energising SOAS into a specialist research university. A new Research & Knowledge Exchange Directorate is being established, to which a Director of Research & Knowledge Exchange will be recruited. To develop an organisational structure that enables SOAS to promote research intensity, culture and collaboration, a second tier of academic leadership and a new College level of organisation is being created, taking effect from September 2022. In that tier will be senior College-level positions for Research and Knowledge Exchange leadership, further strengthening leadership, governance and management of research and knowledge exchange at SOAS.

The Review Process
The HREiR action plan forms part of our overall research strategy, with the strong emphasis that we are taking on research culture, researcher development and on equity, diversity and inclusion. Progress against strategic and operational plans is tracked by the Board of Trustees (BoT) and the Executive Board (EB) and reported to the Research and Enterprise Committee (REC), chaired by the Pro-Director Research & Enterprise, which brings together Departmental Directors of Research (DDRs), Associate Directors of Research (ADRs), the Head of Research and Knowledge Exchange Delivery and key members of her professional team and doctoral student representatives. REC is a sub-committee of the Academic Board (AB) to whom it reports. A sub-committee of REC, the Researcher Concordat Implementation Committee, convenes the HR Excellence in Research Steering Group, chaired by the ADR responsible for Research Ethics and Researcher Development, which comprises key academics, members of professional services and two post-doctoral researchers. This group, which meets on a termly basis with follow-up meetings to keep track of progress, evaluates and monitors progress and is responsible for developing the HREiR action plan. It reports progress to REC annually, including in May 2022. Feedback from the REC members is collated and helps evaluate progress and set goals for the forthcoming year. To keep the HREIR work on the institutional agenda, reporting to REC will take place biannually once the new academic structure has been implemented and a Research Culture Subcommittee has been formed. In May 2022 we newly appointed a Research Culture Manager, who will support and further develop the HREiR action plan, with the goal of creating an enabling research environment. Researchers are engaged during mentoring meetings, training events and research seminars, the ECR Forum (which takes place 4-6 times a year), focus groups, surveys, and departmental engagement with the DDRs, through the monthly DDR Network convened by the Pro-Director Research & Enterprise. Focus groups and surveys run annually with DDRs to measure engagement with the Concordat and HREiR action plan. In the absence of the CEDARS survey, we launched a Research Culture Café in October 2021 to engage post-doctoral researchers. To ensure professionalisation workshops and career development activities meet post-doctoral researchers' needs, feedback is collected after training events.

Evaluation of Achievements and Progress since 2020
Considerable progress has been made in our support for researchers over the past two years, despite the impact of the global pandemic and a period of reorganisation. The Researcher Development Concordat was embedded in our new RKE Strategy (November 2021) and a £100k grant from Research England to promote research culture saw academic departments develop a wide range of programmes to benefit the research community, including our post-doctoral researchers, such as writing retreats, coaching support, and activities aimed at encouraging cross-departmental and cross-disciplinary synergies. There have been substantial developments in institutional policy and practice since 2020:

- Considerable progress has been made in EDI. Our Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy 2021-25 ensures that equality of opportunity is at the core of all our activities. The Race, Accountability and Listening Action Group (RALAG), convened by the Pro-Director Research & Enterprise, developed a cross-institutional analysis and action plan on race equity. Through a newly created position of Associate Director Equity and Accountability, this work has developed into an ambitious strategic intervention with high-level backing from the Director. Our institutional scorecard sets increasing Black academic staff on permanent contracts and increasing Black professional services staff in Grade 8 and above as key priorities.

- We have committed to a proactive approach to decasualisation and considerable progress has been made in implementing the recommendations made by SOAS Decasualisation Working Group, which was led by the Pro-Director Research & Enterprise. The School's decasualisation plan is currently being implemented by Heads of Department (HoDs). Despite our achievements in the

area of decasualisation, it remains difficult, because of our small size, to offer effective redeployment opportunities to researchers on fixed-term contracts. However, we offer a range of support to researchers, including help to transform research outputs for private, public, third (Charities), and fourth (Social Enterprise) sectors, thereby enhancing researchers' employment prospects.

- Addressing the inequitable distribution of academic workload was a primary reason for the design of the new Workload Allocation Management System (WAMS), which is currently being piloted. In 2020-21, the Workload Allocation Working Group, led by the Pro-Director Research & Enterprise, analysed existing practices and the tariffs associated with particular kinds of work, building a model that addressed concerns about the recognition as well as the allocation of work. It has taken some time due to the challenges of our systems, but we are now in a position for the WAMS to be used to allocate work for the coming academic year.

- A new Dignity and Respect Policy, anti-bullying and harassment training programme and network of Dignity Advisors was developed as part of the Culture@SOAS Working Group, led by the Pro-Director Research & Enterprise. These interventions seek to address negative aspects of working culture and workplace incivility that have been highlighted across the sector as undermining a productive, supportive and inclusive research culture.

Full details of progress against the original action plan are provided in the Action Plan 2020-22. A summary of highlights from the last two years is provided below:

Progress against Principle 1 Recruitment and Selection
The School's commitment to fair and inclusive selection and appointment practices is demonstrated by our (re)submission of the Athena Swan and commitment to signing up to the Race Equality Charter. The HR and EDI teams worked together more closely in order to review recruitment processes. As a result, we have changed how we craft job descriptions and reassessed our interview and induction processes and where we advertise. We have increased both the diversity monitoring information available about staff and the analysis of that information. Refreshed Equality Impact Assessments (EIAs) have been produced and are currently in the process of being approved by the relevant bodies. The new EIA process is supported more widely by training from the Inclusion and Learning team.

Progress against Principle 2 Recognition & Value
Building an enabling research culture to support, mentor, and monitor researcher development informed SOAS' key objectives to address the recognition and reward of all researchers, and ECRs in particular. To promote an equitable distribution of academic workload, a new workload management system and policy was approved, communicated to, and welcomed by, researchers. The system underpinning the policy will be launched with the introduction of the new academic structure. Another action to promote staff recognition and wellbeing was the successful implementation of the Employee Assistance Programme (EAP), providing free confidential support to all staff. A key achievement was in expanding access to doctoral researchers.

Progress against Principle 3 Support & Career Development
After a pilot in 2020, Personal Research Plans (PRPs) have been institutionalised in 2021 as a tool to support researchers and facilitate career development. PRPs are conducted by Departmental Directors of Research (DDRs), who have been trained in coaching skills for this purpose. This enables them to gain an overview of research in the department and support researcher development. Our target of 80% engagement with the PRP process has been exceeded. At the institutional level there has been a programme of decasualising academic labour, which has promoted ECR career progression. 39 staff members on fractional contracts have become permanent staff in 2022. At departmental level, initiatives have been developed to facilitate career development, including writing retreats and clinics, and targeted research mentoring and coaching.

Progress against Principle 4 Researchers' Responsibilities
Part of SOAS' decolonising research vision is that research is carried out in an ethical manner. Version 2 of the Epigeum Research Integrity course was launched in 2020 and is mandatory for PGR students at upgrade to PhD and researchers on externally funded projects. In 2020-21, 16 staff passed the course, rising to 40 for the present academic year. The pass rate for doctoral researchers has been particularly high: 88% in 2021-22. Where research involves potentially vulnerable participant groups, researchers are required to complete a mandatory safeguarding training module. Our research community has begun engaging more proactively in their own research development, evidenced in the increase of research staff with a Google Scholar profile and an ORCID iD. The SOAS Open Access Policy has been updated, clearly stating researchers' responsibilities to engage with Open Access publishing.

Progress against Principle 5 Diversity & Equality
Diversity and equality are at the core of all SOAS' activities. We have taken action to address the 'broken pipeline' of researchers of colour into academic careers, offering ringfenced postdoctoral fellowships and PhD scholarships. 'Where do you draw the Line' anti-bullying training was developed and rolled out in 2020-21 to address workplace incivility. We have reduced our gender pay gap from 6.5% to 4% and our ethnicity pay gap from 12 to 10.12% and are committed to reducing this further. Enhanced monitoring of attendance at recruitment and selection training resulted in a gender-balanced and more diverse representation on interview and promotion panels. A new transgender equality policy is being developed with expert guidance from Gendered Intelligence.

Progress against Principle 6 Implementation & Review

Since researchers are considered among the key stakeholders in the School, they are provided with formal and informal opportunities to engage with relevant organisational policy and decision-making processes, which have been made more transparent as part of a governance review. Organisational policies are shared via SOAS Sharepoint to which ECRs have access. Post-doctoral researchers are represented on the HREiR Steering Group and research staff has been consulted in the development of the new RKE Strategy.

Strategy 2022-24 by Concordat Principles

Our new strategic direction for SOAS involves the creation of a second tier of academic leadership, which de-centralises aspects of operational stewardship from the senior management team closer to the academic departments. The new academic structure, which will be implemented in September 2022, strengthens SOAS' ability to effectively and efficiently deliver as an HE institution in a global context, re-establish research intensity, and work in an interdisciplinary way. In order to provide a better sense of coherence and scale, our eleven academic departments will be grouped into three Colleges, with each College having an academic lead for Research and Knowledge Exchange and for Learning and Teaching. This reorganisation of academic groupings is not meant to be cost saving and will not result in any job losses. To align our Forward-Looking Action Plan with the new academic structure, SOAS elected to stay on a biennial HREiR review cycle. Our objectives for the next two years reflect SOAS' RKE Strategy, which has been developed through a process of consultation and engagement that has taken shape over the course of 2020-21, and sets out four objectives: 1) enhancing our research culture; 2) building and developing our capacity for research and knowledge exchange; 3) fostering ideas and building connections; and 4) increasing SOAS' visibility and influence, embedding the SOAS Decolonising Vision into our everyday research and knowledge exchange practices. Our success will be measured in terms of timely achievement of the actions set out in the Action Plan, which is intended to be a living document; the actions are not static, but will be updated annually to ensure they remain relevant. We will (re-)introduce a number of different instruments for measuring impact, as outlined below. Our objectives for the next two years speak to the emphasis in the wider UK Research and Innovation scene on creating an inclusive, creative and vibrant research environment through an emphasis on people and culture:

Principle Environment and culture

We will tackle institutional barriers to research intensiveness, including through building stronger links between research and teaching and releasing time for research and knowledge exchange, which are fully recognised and accounted for in the WAMS. The implementation of the WAMS in 2022-23 will result in a more just distribution of academic leadership and administrative labour, measures that reckon with the impact of structural discrimination on research careers, and support for people with caring responsibilities. The effectiveness of the WAMs will be measured in the all-staff and PULSE surveys, which include questions on work-life balance. To promote a healthy working environment, the newly appointed staff wellbeing lead will roll out REACT training in March 2023 to facilitate managers having wellbeing conversations with their staff. We will create a strong and innovative environment for researcher development, improving every stage of the doctoral and ECR journey, from training and supervision to collaborative working, funding and support, evidenced in greater satisfaction with our training and research environment. To measure satisfaction with the research and work environment, we will conduct an annual staff survey in November, a bi-annual PULSE survey, an internal annual survey of research-only staff, and a PRES survey every two years.

Principle Employment

At the heart of a successful research-intensive university are its researchers. We will attract and retain excellent researchers, with a strategic focus on building critical mass, by putting in place specialist leadership training in order to foster a new generation of research leaders and creating a pipeline from under-represented groups into research careers through ringfenced scholar- and fellowships. Recognising that the institutional percentage of casualised FTE labour stands above the sector average, SOAS committed to a programme of decasualisation. By implementing departmental decasualisation plans, fractional employment of academic FTE will be reduced to 4% by 2025. In addition, HoDs will create more lectureships, thereby fostering career progression for ECRs. As part of our effort to cultivate an equitable work environment, we are similarly committed to eliminating the gender, race, and disability pay gaps to zero, recognising that this will require sustained action over a prolonged period.

Principle Professional and Career Development

As part of our new academic two-tier model, we will be investing in School leadership, structures and governance emphasising the importance of professional and career development, as well as in professional services around knowledge exchange to support researchers seeking to explore a diversity of careers. The newly created RKE Directorate will encourage researchers to apply for Impact Acceleration Accounts and other funding streams that offer short-term public, private and third sector placement opportunities and will track the number of placements. To facilitate researcher development, we will support doctoral and post-doctoral researchers through providing funding opportunities, research infrastructure (e.g. a dedicated research hub space), and training and networking facilities. New training events and workshops will be developed in consultation with ECRs, who will be represented on School-wide committees in the new academic structure. The new staff development platform, Inkpath, allows us to evaluate take up of professional development activities. We will continue adopting a coach-approach to research mentoring in the personal research plans (PRPs). While they are currently mandatory for staff on a 0.4FTE contract, PRPs will be rolled out to all research-active staff in the new academic structure.