Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion Strategy

2021-25

October 2021

Foreword

Equality, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) are central to SOAS. We are committed to creating a socially just institutional community in which all our members experience belonging and are treated with civility and respect. We therefore will ensure that we stand firm against all forms of discrimination, enhance our capacity to listen and respond, and foster an enabling environment.

EDI is not only a social justice commitment – it is also core to the academic and research agenda. This is because it is not possible to create a productive workforce without the commitment that arises from staff feeling that they belong and are acknowledged within an institution. It also is not possible to respond to the global challenges of our time and come together as a human community without first coming together as an institutional community.

The SOAS Strategic Plan therefore recognises institutional community as a foundational pillar. Our EDI Plan is an extension of this and provides an important roadmap for the way ahead.

Professor Adam Habib
Director

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Who we are

SOAS University of London is proud to be recognised as the leading Higher Education Institution in Europe specialising in the study of Asia, Africa and the Near and Middle East. SOAS is a distinct institution, uniquely combining language, scholarship, disciplinary expertise, and regional focus. Our expertise is rooted in the political, social, economic, historical, and cultural dynamics of Africa, Asia and the Middle East and their diasporas, which collectively account for over three-quarters of the world's population. Our programmes are taught by recognised academics engaged in fieldwork and research which influences government policy and the lives of individuals across the globe. In a world of shrinking borders, SOAS is best placed to model an institutional environment that actively challenges exclusions and structural inequalities.

Core Values

SOAS's core values underpin all our activities, and these reflect the value of equality and diversity through the following:

Promoting equality & celebrating diversity	SOAS is a community that celebrates diversity with our diverse population as one of our greatest strengths. Equality of opportunity is at the core of all the SOAS activities.
Promoting cultural understanding	SOAS is committed to fostering broad cultural understanding in the UK and in the world at large. SOAS will strive for the highest ethical standards in all its dealings and foster the values of openness, honesty, tolerance, fairness and responsibility in all areas.
Community	SOAS recognises that its greatest assets are its staff and students. We will strive to create an atmosphere of community, collegiality and cooperation for all staff and students.
Transparency & accounability	Decisions at SOAS are made based on the best available evidence and quality information is shared. We aspire to exemplary standards of governance in all that we do.

Finally, the new strategic plan sets out an ambitious vision of *Reimagining SOAS for the 21st Century.* This vision is structured around four key pillars outlined below and it guides our Interventions in the refreshed EDI strategy.

International Partnerships

Interrogate & understand
the planetary questions
of our time from the global South

Teaching

Interdisciplinary
Hybrid
Curriculum

Reimagining SOAS for the 21st century

Institutional community

Building a
socially just
community

Teaching & Research

Driving Research Intensity

Legislative Context

The ambitions set out in this strategy go beyond meeting our legal requirements and best practice. This strategy is a vehicle to deliver sustainable, holistic, and long-term positive impact within all our key priorities and programmes. However, our sector and legislative commitments remain an important benchmark. Across the sector disparities are well documented from access to higher education, degree award and employment outcomes. Furthermore, the Office for Students (OfS) in England has set new targets for institutions to close their race attainment gaps and the issue has been given a profile by the Cabinet Office and the Government's Race Disparity Audit.

The matrix below outlines the requirements that SOAS as a public sector body is required to fulfil by the Equality Act 2010.

Protected characteristics	Equality Act obligations
• Race • Age • Sex • Gender Reassignment • Disability • Religion or Belief • Sexual Orientation • Marriage or Civil Partnership • Pregnancy and Maternity	- Direct Discrimination - Indirect Discrimination - Harassment - Victimisation
Public Sector Duty Requirements	**Specific Duties**
• Eliminate Discrimination • Advance Equality of Opportunity • Foster good relations between different groups within the SOAS community • Demonstrate due regard for equality in policies and processes.	- Publish relevant, proportionate information showing compliance with Equality Duty - Publish Equality Objectives

Athena SWAN
SOAS's commitment to gender equality in academic, professional and support roles is demonstrated by our membership of the Athena SWAN Charter. The charter seeks to encourage and recognise commitment to advancing the careers of women and promote gender equality more widely within Higher Education and research. It originally focused on Science, Technology, Engineering, Maths and Medicine (STEMM) subjects, but was expanded in 2015 to include arts and humanities departments, professional and support staff, and trans staff. SOAS successfully renewed its Bronze Award in April 2019.

The Race Equality Charter
We have committed to applying for the Race Equality Charter (REC) with a commitment to make a submission for the REC during this strategy period. The framework provides an opportunity for institutions to identify and self-reflect on institutional and cultural barriers standing in the way of Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic staff and students

Building a Socially Just Community

SOAS is a global university in the heart of London with 40% of our academic staff and 43% of non-academic staff from Black and Minority Ethnic groups. 58% of our students are from Black and Minority Ethnic groups. Therefore, diversity and inclusion are at the heart of the SOAS community.

While the numbers above mean that SOAS has surpassed sector averages, we want to look beyond that. We know that we experience the world and institutions based on how we are positioned along race, gender, and class. We are therefore bold and decisive in our resolve to name these inequities at SOAS and dedicate resources to resolving them during this strategic plan period 2021 - 2025.

The SOAS strategy foregrounds a vision of an institution that through its teaching, research and community engagement responds to the global challenges of our time. Consequently, our refreshed EDI strategy acknowledges that these inequalities are part and parcel of how we collectively experience SOAS.

We refocus our commitment to the imprint of global inequalities in our institution by identifying areas for continued investment to improve representation, maximise inclusion to facilitate belonging. These commitments beyond being central to the SOAS strategic plan are also informed by requirements set out in the Public Sector Equality Duty

Through a small, talented, and dedicated team, we will work in close partnership with directorates,departmental heads, union leads, the SOAS community and experts across the sector to deliver the commitments set out in this strategy.

In identifying the pillars that shape our equality, diversity, and inclusion work, we respond to the following multi-dimensional objectives:

1. Diagnose and address manifestations of structural racism at SOAS
2. Foreground an intersectional approach to EDI at SOAS that is attentive to how inequalities are reproduced and sustained at the axis of race, gender, and class
3. Broaden the representation of under-represented groups across our academic and professional services ranks.
4. Strengthen institutional accountability for EDI commitments and outcomes
5. Foster decolonial and anti-racist pedagogical and management approaches

Consequently, the priorities below foreground our commitment to ensuring equitable representation of Black and minority ethnic staff within the institution and creating an enabling environment for their success. In meeting this commitment, we also recognise the importance of building a pipeline of Black and minority ethnic academics which will be done through a range of multi-dimensional strategies including scholarships and intellectual pathway development initiatives. SOAS interventions on diversity and inclusion will always be informed by a broader commitment to social justice rather than sector averages and benchmarks.

Strategic Pillars

The revised EDI strategy is framed around five pillars outlined below:

Pillar	Key Performance Indicators
Governance and Accountability	• Improve intersectional equality data collection • Improve mechanisms for addressing workplace conflict and student complaints • Develop capable, inclusive leadership and management practice
Legal Compliance	• Renew Athena SWAN • Attain Race Equality Charter Bronze award
Representation	• Increase the proportion of Black academics on permanent contracts • Increase the proportion of Black staff in grade 8, 9 and 10 in professional services • Improve inclusion and progression of staff across all protected characteristics • Increase the proportion of Black and women of colour in senior leadership • Reduce ethnicity and gender pay gaps
Student Experience and Outcomes	• Improve the student awarding gap particularly for Black students • Pilot Race and Belonging module for all undergraduate and postgraduate taught students • Streamline and strengthen decolonising approach across our teaching, research, and assessments • Increase scholarships for Black students at under-graduate, postgraduate, doctoral & post-doctoral levels to build a pipeline of Black academics
Belonging	• Worldmaking Beyond SOAS flagship initiative that will build a body of research and learning material on the intersectional questions at the heart of racial justice • Thought Leadership series that cultivates a quarterly learning, reflection, and action-oriented community • Career development forum for Black and minority ethnic staff

Institutional Scorecard Key Performance Indicators*

• Increase the representation of Black academic staff on permanent contracts
• Increase the representation of Black professional services staff at grade 8, 9 and 10
• Reduce the ethnicity pay gap
• Streamline our disciplinary processes including building a restorative justice community

Quantitative targets are found in the institutional scorecard.

Other Key Performance Indicators

- Improve the awarding gap for Black students
- Renew Athena Swan Bronze
- Apply for the Race Equality Chartermark
- Foster and sustain a culture of inclusive management and conflict resolution
- Streamline and strengthen a decolonising and anti-racist approach across our teaching, research, and assessments

We will also use regular staff and student surveys for qualitative assessments on belonging, inclusion and perceptions of fairness that cannot be effectively captured through key performance indicators.

Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion Governance Structure

The EDI Committee is a sub-committee of the academic board. The EDI committee monitors, tracks, and ensures accountability for EDI commitments across the School. It reports three times a year to the academic board and onward to the Board of Trustees. The EDI committee also reports to the Executive Board on matters requiring urgent institutional attention.

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