

SOAS, UNIVERSITY OF LONDON

THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES (BoT)

Monday 9th November 2015

OPEN MINUTES

**The Ambassadors Hotel Bloomsbury, 12 Upper Woburn Place, London,
WC1H 0HX**

Dr T Miller (Chairman)
Mr G Dalal (Honorary Treasurer)
Sir M Harris (Vice-Chair)
Baroness V Amos (Director)
Professor R Black (Pro Director)
Professor N Rao (Pro Director)

Mr K Adjepong-Boateng
Dr T Barton
Mr T King
Ms R Mortuza
Professor D Mosse
Professor C Oughton

Mr A Popham
Mr J Robinson*
Ms H Slydel
Mr S Tinton
Mr N Uddin

In attendance: Mr G Appleby (Director of Finance & Planning)
Mr P Doyle (Director of Human Resources)
Ms Laura Gibbs (Registrar)
Ms S Green (Minutes)
Dr C Ince (Secretary)
Professor M Craven (Dean, Law & Social Sciences)
Professor L Marten (Dean, Languages & Cultures)
Professor G Singh (Dean, Arts & Humanities)

Apologies: Mrs S Alier
Lord Williams of Baglan

Ms R Mortuza
Sir D Reddaway
Mr D Skinner

1. Membership, Terms of Reference, procedures for the conduct of meetings and the annual plan of work for 2015-16

The Chair welcomed the Board to the first meeting of the Academic Year. The Terms of Reference and the procedures for the conduct of meetings were duly **noted**. The annual plan of work was also noted.

The apologies for the meeting were also **noted**.

The Chair reminded the Board that many papers and matters that were discussed within the meetings were confidential, and expected to remain so.

2. Conflicts of Interest

There were no conflicts reported.

3. Minutes

The Board of Trustees **approved** the minutes of the meeting on 6th July 2015.

4. Actions Taken

MIN 41 – Key Performance Indicators (KPI's)

The Chair of the Audit Committee **reported** that at its meeting the previous week, the Committee had acknowledged that the KPI's would be significantly revised, as they did not adequately the current financial and changes expected in the School's structure, partly in response to the ongoing discussions around sustainability.

Action:

The Director and the Senior Management Team would revise the KPI's as part of the Sustainability Programme.

MIN 63 – CUC Code

The Secretary reported that the requirements of the new CUC code had been incorporated within the Board of Trustees (previously Governing Body) Effectiveness review. This action was closed.

MIN 78 – Prevent

The Registrar **reported** that the set of guidelines for the Prevent Legislation had been published since the legislation had become law on 1st September 2015.

A Working Group that had been set up to look at the impact of the legislation and in particular the freedom of speech aspect on SOAS values had met twice since then. It was noted that UCU had agreed to join the Group, but both the Students' Union and Unison had not.

MIN 85 – Academic Items on the annual programme

The Pro-Director (Learning & Teaching) **reported** that the academic items had been incorporated within the Trustee's annual plan of work, but in light of the Green Paper that was published yesterday; the annual plan of work would need to be re-evaluated.

5. Matters Arising / Matters for Report

I. President of SOAS.

The Chair **reported** that the Nominations Committee had endorsed the reappointment of Mrs Graca Machal as President for a second term of office, from August 2016-August 2020. Mrs Machal had welcomed the invitation to continue her role as President. The Board warmly approved the re-appointment.

6. The Director's Report [Appendix B]

The Board received the three Director's reports that had been published since September. The Board then asked the Director if it would be able to receive updates on PGT recruitment for 2015 given the volatility of the market in respect to PGT applications, and also in respect of the financial impact that this may have on the School's income.

The Pro-Director confirmed that the Student Recruitment reports were available, and these would be made available to Trustees prior to the next meeting at the end of November. In particular the Board was keen to understand how many applicants there had been, the numbers of offers that were accepted and the conversion percentage into actual enrolments.

Action:

The latest UG, PGR & PGT Student Recruitment reports to be shared with the Board of Trustees. [Pro-Director (Learning & Teaching)]

It was noted that many PGT applicants decided late in the cycle whether to enrol. The historic data available had been unable to predict any consistency or trends in respect of PGT applications. However overall there was a decline in this market.

The Board discussed the overall strategy around recruitment and questioned why applicants were declining. The Pro-Director (Learning & Teaching) confirmed that a decliner's survey was already being used and a key factor was around the cost of study and living in London.

The international student market was felt to be of particular importance at SOAS, and the Board requested to see the latest decliner's survey data.

Action:

The latest decliner survey's to be shared with the Board of Trustees. [Pro-Director (Learning & Teaching/Director MSR)]

7. Strategy & Sustainability [Appendix C]

The Director introduced this paper and there followed a considerable discussion on the issues.

The paper proposed the formal establishment of a Programme Board which would direct and co-ordinate five key work streams to ensure both viable academic and financial sustainability for SOAS' future. The overarching aim of the Programme Board was to bring the themes of sustainability together in a cohesive way, and to ensure transparency and better communication.

The work streams were:

1. A clear strategy for SOAS' future (5-10 years ahead)
2. Development and implementation of plans for financial sustainability
3. Curriculum Review
4. REF Improvement plan – for REF2020
5. Clarification of governance structures within SOAS

The Director had briefed the school on the potential changes in her Director's forum meeting on 15th October 2015. The aim was for the School to continue to be the world leader in Asia, Africa and the Middle East, and to be ranked outstanding in all areas. The timetable encompassed both informal and formal consultation periods and included time for discussions on the scope for new partnerships and further investment.

It was acknowledged by the Board that the financial deficit that the School was currently facing was much greater than previously predicted, due predominately to the shortfall in PGT recruitment.

Board members noted that there was a need to improve communication within the School and that there was a level of mistrust in why decisions were taken and this had a negative impact on morale.

A document relating to the sustainability of academic programmes had been circulated to staff before it had been discussed and had included incorrect information. Two Board Members requested that there was an inquiry into the Curriculum Review email, and had addressed their concerns in a letter to the Chair and the Board. The Chair promised to respond to the email letter. However, the Board felt that an inquiry into the initial Curriculum Reform email would not be of benefit. There had already been apologies made regarding the matter, which had been acknowledged by various bodies across the School. The Director circulated a document covering the key facts in relation to the issue.

The Director of Finance & Planning made a presentation to the Board on the School's financial position. The presentation covered the historical position, previous financial projections, recruitment positions, both for the UG and PG cohorts, the School's financial shortfall and the impacts of phasing of actions, which included possible scenarios for future financial sustainability.

It was **noted** that recruitment results for PGT and PGR in the current session had been disappointing. Whilst comparator data could be provided by HESA for undergraduates, it was not possible to provide this for PGT data. For the PGR data the school was already at the upper end of the staff number/ full time equivalent multiplier so this could not be expanded significantly further.

The Board noted that a £1.4m provision had already been made to adjust against potential shortfalls in fee income. The Board of Trustees primary responsibility was fiduciary, and that a 5% operating surplus target by 2017/18 was the target in the agreed Financial Strategy. The overall budgetary shortfall had increased to £6.5m based on this latest recruitment data.

The Board agreed that the first step would be to identify areas such as budgetary underspends where savings could be made. However, if income continued at this level whilst costs continued to increase, then the main way of addressing the revenue shortfall would be to look at staff costs. The Director of Finance & Planning highlighted a table demonstrating the staff costs at SOAS, as a percentage of income, in comparison to other UoL institutions, as a benchmark. The School was a significant outlier in this and one of the highest figures in the sector.

Once the presentation had concluded, the Board discussed that changes must be implemented to ensure that SOAS' current financial position was reversed. The Board acknowledged that the issues facing SOAS were of a fundamental nature, and although the facts were unpalatable there were opportunities to increase revenue by addressing marketing and market position. All options to make savings and to increase revenue needed to be explored and there was also a need to ensure investments could be made in key areas.

Whilst there was some concern over the proposed Programme Board and the timeline for the work, the Board of Trustees as a whole acknowledged that doing nothing was not an option. It also noted that although the finer detail of all the plans had yet to be worked through, the intention of the programme was to ensure that there was a cohesive attempt to address the serious issues of academic governance and structures as well as the financial situation.

The Board noted the Director's plans to create the Sustainability Programme Board as a vehicle for discussing and agreeing proposals to address the challenges faced by the School. The Board agreed that any plans had to be carried out with pace and responsibility, and that they would wish to review the outputs.

Members of the Board who were present underlined that for the Programme of Sustainability to work, the trust, and engagement from across the School was critical.

Action: Director to convene the Programme Board and implement the 5 work streams for a sustainable SOAS, and to report outcomes to the Board of Trustees

Action: The Chair to respond to the letter to the Board of Trustees, requesting an inquiry into the Curriculum Review matter.

8. REF2020 (SOAS Research: Moving forward from REF20114) [Appendix D]

The Pro-Director (Research & Enterprise) presented a paper on the research environment at SOAS and what had been done since the REF result in 2014.

It was also noted that the Higher Education Green Paper which had been published the day prior had primarily focussed on teaching, and not research.

Significant measures including subject-based benchmarking of research income had been introduced within the Faculty Plans, along with an increased service level within the Research Office and a commitment to supporting the securing and management of external research grants.

In terms of governance of the initiative, a REF Steering Group with a cross department representation had been set up and would report regularly to Academic Board, and the Board of Trustees.

9. Board of Trustees – Effectiveness Review

The Vice-Chair, who was Chair of this Working Group reported on the meeting which had taken place the week prior.

He explained to the Board that the meeting itself had been extremely positive and the Group had agreed that academic staff involvement in all areas at SOAS was imperative. The Group's view was that the academic matters needed to be more apparent in decision making. To facilitate this, proposals around the membership of Academic Board, and a new Senate type structure would be brought to the Board plus thoughts on a more informal structure to promote discussion. However, to facilitate this it did mean that the continued discussion on the Faculties and Academic structures in SOAS needed to take place with urgency.

10. Meetings of Governing Body

The Board of Trustees **noted** the next meeting would be held on 27th November 2015 at 09.30am, to be held at College Buildings, SOAS.

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GOVERNING BODY

Action Points 2014/15

Minute	Item	Action	Deadline For Report to GB	By
41	KPIs	Update of KPIs	22/4/16	GA
81	Finance	Paper on options for Vernon Square	22/4/16	GA
91	Student Complaints Procedure	GB to see annual report on complaints and appeals	11/7/16	CI

Minute	Item	Action points 2015/16	Deadline For Report to GB	By
4	HE Green Paper	Review of academic items in annual plan	22/4/16	NR
6	The Director's Report	Student Recruitment data to be circulated to the BoT	27/11/15	NR
6	The Director's Report	Student Recruitment Decliners survey to be circulated to the BoT	27/11/15	NR
7	Sustainability Report	Convene Sustainability Programme Board	27/11/15	VA
7	Sustainability Report	The Chair to respond to inquiry letter	27/11/15	TM