

## General Information about Committees (March 2019)

This document gives general information about the School's committee structure, and a brief description of the roles of committee Chairs, Secretaries and members. More detailed information can be found on the SOAS website as follows:

Role of a Committee Chair:

<http://www.soas.ac.uk/admin/governance/policies/file37353.pdf>

Role of a Committee Member:

<http://www.soas.ac.uk/admin/governance/policies/file37354.pdf>

Role of a Committee Secretary:

<http://www.soas.ac.uk/admin/governance/policies/file37355.pdf>

Guidelines for producing committee papers can be found at:

<http://www.soas.ac.uk/admin/governance/policies/file72069.pdf>

If you have difficulty accessing these documents, they can be found at the address below, where they are listed on the right-hand side of the page as downloadable documents. This page also lists the School committees and has links through to the committee papers that are currently available.

<http://www.soas.ac.uk/committees>

### 1. The School's Charter and Standing Orders

SOAS is a chartered institution. The School's Royal Charter, granted in 1916, broadly defines the purposes of the School and sets out its system of governance.

The SOAS Charter & Articles empower the Board of Trustees to create Standing Orders, which operationalise the School's Charter & Articles by defining the detail of our system of governance. The School's Charter & Articles may only be amended by the Privy Council (on the recommendation of the Board of Trustees) and Standing Orders may only be amended by the Board of Trustees.

Amongst other things, Standing Orders and its Annexes

<http://www.soas.ac.uk/admin/governance/standingorders> sets out the membership and terms of reference (areas of responsibility) of each of the School's committees.

Standing Orders also contains procedures for the conduct of committee meetings. These are the rules by which committees are run. They are designed to enable committees to function effectively, ensuring that members receive appropriate information in a timely fashion, and that meetings take place in a constructive atmosphere.

### 2. Committees

During 2018 the School's committee structure was reviewed as part of the restructuring of the School (Academic and Professional Services).

As a result of the review, the committee structure was streamlined in order to create a framework which would maximise the School's ability to deliver its strategic objectives. The current committee structure is set out in section 6. At the time of the review, certain principles were established on which the structure was based. These are outlined in Annex 1.

School committees perform a very important function. They have an essential role in ensuring that School-wide strategies are developed, and that progress towards the realistic yet challenging goals we set ourselves is properly monitored and assessed.

The School has a hierarchical committee structure. The Board of Trustees has overall responsibility for 'the general supervision, direction and control of all aspects of the School'. All committees ultimately report to the Board of Trustees. Some committees have a direct reporting line to the Board of Trustees, while some report to the Board of Trustees through other committees.

The following committees report directly to the Board of Trustees:

- Academic Board
- Audit Committee
- Executive Board
- Health, Safety & Security Committee
- Honorary Degrees & Fellowships Committee
- LMEI Board of Trustees
- Nominations Committee
- Resources & Planning Committee
- Senior Staff Remuneration Committee

Both Academic Board and Resources & Planning Committee have a number of committees which report to them, each with a specific area of responsibility. The role of most committees in the School is to develop School strategies and to monitor their delivery. The responsibilities of each committee, along with details of membership are set out in the School's Standing Orders which can be found at <http://www.soas.ac.uk/admin/governance/standingorders/>

This hierarchical structure does not mean that every paper/issue will eventually make its way on to the Board of Trustees agenda. Some committees have delegated responsibility for particular areas.

For example, Academic Board's overall responsibility is to advise the Board of Trustees on any proposal relating to the academic scope, academic structure and academic standards of the School, but within this, Academic Board has responsibility for approving the School's academic policies, and for agreeing School academic regulations.

Resources & Planning Committee monitors the finances of the School on behalf of the Board of Trustees, and advises on the financial implications of new proposals. As part of its remit it has delegated authority to approve certain expenditure proposals, financial regulations and investment arrangements.

### **3. Committee Chair**

The role of the Chair is to ensure that the business which comes to the committee is dealt with appropriately and that the committee reaches a consensus, enabling the business of the committee to be completed, and if necessary, move on through the committee structure.

The Chair, along with the Secretary, is responsible for ensuring that the committee only deals with items which fall within its remit. The Chair determines the order of business on the agenda. Chairs decide on the amount of time spent on each item, and work with committee members to ensure that the committee deals with its business effectively and efficiently. They are responsible for managing the flow of business through the meeting, for facilitating discussion, ensuring that the committee reaches a consensus, and that any necessary action is allocated appropriately.

### **4. Committee Secretaries**

The Committee Secretary would normally be the first point of call for queries relating to the committee, its membership, its remit, or the progress of business.

The role of the Secretary is, amongst other things, to advise the Chair on what the committee can and cannot do and to prepare papers for meetings, ensuring that others provide the information necessary for the committee to conduct its business.

The timely preparation and distribution of papers is important, and means that the Secretary needs to work to strict deadlines. They will be able to offer advice on the presentation of papers, and what it is appropriate for a committee to be asked to do.

As well as producing the minutes of each meeting, the Secretary's job involves ensuring that items pass appropriately through the committee structure and reminding individuals of the action points that were agreed at the meeting.

The Secretary also liaises with the Chair and members between meetings, if this proves necessary, in order to complete the business of the committee. This will involve following up action which needs to be taken, asking members for updates on action points from the meeting, and reporting to the Chair and committee things which have, or have not, been completed.

### **5. Committee Member**

SOAS committees normally contain two categories of member. Some members are 'exofficio', which means that they are members of the committee by virtue of the post they hold in the School. Others are nominated members. Members may have been nominated by, for example, Faculties, the Pro-Directors, the Registrar or the Students' Union Executive Committee, and will have been put forward because of the particular skills, interest or expertise that they have.

Given this, it is not normally possible for another individual to attend a meeting in place of a nominated committee member who is unable to attend.

Irrespective of their route to the committee, all committee members are expected to work together to help with the overall governance of the institution, for the benefit of the School as a whole. Members are not on committees as representatives of particular groups or sections of the School community unless this is explicitly stated in the committee's terms of reference (for example a Trade Union representative).

Committee members should receive papers in advance of meetings, and are expected to make themselves familiar with these documents. While the Chair is there to lead the meeting, it is important that members take responsibility for making the points they feel are necessary. It must be recognised that, however strongly members feel about particular issues, they are expected to co-operate with the Chair to ensure the fair and effective transaction of business, and the observance of the courtesies of debate.

Committees have a key role to play in the School, and the contribution made by committee members is a vital component in determining how successful committees are.

#### **6. Current Structure and Further Information**

The current committee structure is set out below.

Further information and advice can be obtained from the Secretariat Manager and copies of committee papers may be viewed on the SOAS website.

<b>Board of Trustees</b> <i>Decisions and sign off</i>
Overall responsibility for strategic direction and governance. Effective delegation of responsibilities to Directors, Executive Team and committees

**Annex 1**

<b>Audit Committee</b>	<b>Executive Board</b>	<b>Academic Board</b>	<b>Senior Staff Remuneration</b>	<b>Health and Safety</b>	<b>Honorary degrees and fellowships</b>	<b>Governance Nominations Committee</b>	<b>Resources and Planning Committee</b>
Appoint, approve, monitor and evaluate internal & external auditors & scope. Structures for maximum effectiveness	Advise on planning & corporate strategy; policies; coordination of management; strategic planning; prioritisation of strategy and non-academic policies	Development, direction and quality of academic scope, structure and standards	Remunerations, terms and conditions of service of Senior staff, performance of staff and severance pay	Development, changes and implementation of HSS policies, compliance, training & risk arrangements; business continuity & incident review	Considers suggestions for awards	Amend, monitor and evaluate governance arrangement & policies; appointment to committees and Board and Trustees	Agree, monitor and scrutinise expenditure, funding, budgets and financial regulations.

● Denotes Student Sabbatical Officer/s attendance

**Specialist scrutiny and recommendation**

<b>Research &amp; Enterprise Committee</b>	<b>Equality &amp; Diversity Committee</b>	<b>Senate</b>	<b>Teaching, Learning and Student Experience Committee</b>	<b>Student Experience and Engagement Committee</b>
Monitor, evaluate and deliver strategic planning and policies for R&E, advise on business links and implications of R&K transfer, QA development/closure of research centres, QA R&E links across school; research degrees, research, student numbers and completion rates of external assessment and research funding	Monitor, evaluate and deliver strategic planning and policies for E&D	Academic input to School, consider and vote on issues referred by members	Implement and monitor teaching, learning and student experience strategic plan. Monitor the delivery of areas of learning and teaching relating to research degrees and provision for research students. Monitor marketing, collaboration and delivery of academic programmes. Approve policies, procedures and code of practice recommended by its sub-committee.	Implement, monitor and advise on the School's Student Experience Strategy and policy and extracurricular strategy and policy. Share good practice on student engagement

<b>Research and Ethics Panel</b>
Monitor and advise on all ethical implications of research, consider all research proposals/publications; embargo hard/soft copies of PhD theses and review policy.
<b>Brunei Advisory Panel</b>
Review and agree exhibition proposals with consideration of School (inc finances), arrange own collections, consider and approve object rotation, monitor suitability of condition of material,
<b>REF Steering Group</b>
<b>Doctoral School Management Group</b>
Management of postgraduate research students incl. process and policies, support management of AHRC, represent school ESRC-funded Bloomsbury Doctoral Training Centre for the Social Sciences & issues between Bloomsbury Colleges and receive financial reports

<b>Curriculum Quality Assurance Committee</b>
Approve: visiting examiners, annual programme review, procedures for approval of curriculum changes at module level. Termination, changes to or new programmes. Implement and monitor aspects of T&L strategy that relate to maintenance and monitoring of academic standards. Monitor development of procedures for quality and standards delivered in partnerships and good practice in L&T. Advise internal and external research framework changes and implications for research degrees and PGR students.
<b>Student Outcomes Panel</b>
Advise on development of learning and teaching strategy in relation to participation, retention, progression and destinations of students. Advise on changes to academic regulations, related policies, codes of practice and procedures to contribute to improved outcomes. Advise on changes to Careers and employability strategy and policies. Monitor outcome for all students including differences between groups and characteristics of students. Identify, analyse and disseminate examples of good practice which contribute to improved outcomes. Implement Careers and employability strategy and policies.

## Principles on which the committee structure is based

### 1. Committees should be strategic, not operational.

It has been agreed that the role of most committees is to develop School strategies and to monitor their delivery. Committees are not expected to assume responsibility for operational areas which are the responsibility of others (such as the Professional Services Directorates, or the Deans). This enables a group of individuals, with a range of experience, expertise and responsibilities, to contribute towards establishing the direction in which the School is heading, whilst leaving those with particular operational skills and knowledge to determine how we get there. Where committees have responsibility for dealing with specific operational issues (for example LTQC), this is set out in the Committee's terms of reference.

### 2. Membership

#### a) Committees should be as small as practicable

Committees need to be a size which will allow discussion and debate to flourish, in order that consensus can be reached. It is pretty difficult to ensure that this happens when numbers get into double figures, let alone when the committee numbers 30+. Large committees are also wasteful of people's time.

#### b) Committees contributed to the governance of the School.

The role of committee members is not to represent a particular group or interest. Members are on committees as individuals, bringing their skills and expertise to help with the overall governance of the institution, to the benefit of the School as a whole. While members may be from a particular group and can bring the views of that group to the meeting, once at the meeting, the interests of the School must be the overriding consideration. The only exception to this non-representative role is where committees (such as Health & Safety) have, for example, Trade Union representatives on them, and are required to do so. This view of committee membership is supported both in the School's Standing Orders and in the guidance produced by the Committee of University Chairs (CUC), which the School is required to follow.

#### c) Given the strategic nature of committees, membership should include those who are responsible for ensuring delivery on strategies at senior level.

Much of what committees do is about devising, proposing and refining strategies for the School, and then monitoring its implementation. Directors of Professional Services on a committee need be able to take an overview of what is achievable, and then (where appropriate) to ensure that the colleagues for whom they are responsible actually deliver. It is not necessary for every operational manager whose area falls within the remit of a committee to be a member of that committee or to attend every single meeting. They may attend for items where they have specific responsibility if the committee feels this would help with its work. Directors of Professional Services should only be members of those committees at which their areas of responsibility are discussed on a regular basis. Otherwise, they should be invited to attend particular meetings where specific items are discussed. 6 Some academic committee members will be there because they have been nominated by

their Faculty in order to bring certain experience or expertise to meetings. However, depending on the committee, for the reasons outlined above, it may also be necessary to have senior academic managers as members as well. That is not to say that committees cannot ask for reports from individuals who are not members (they can, and have always been able to do this), and individuals can be asked to attend parts of meetings to speak to any papers they may have written, or provide advice where this is required. However, they would not be expected to attend every meeting, and should only attend for a specific item.

### **3) Committees can invite specialists to attend parts of meetings**

In the past, the number of people 'in attendance' at some committee meetings outnumbered the members. When the current committee structure was put in place, it was agreed that it was wasteful to have people who were not members attending every meeting of the subcommittees of Academic Board and Resources & Planning Committee, so these committees do not have people 'in attendance'. This should not stop these committees inviting individuals with particular expertise to attend parts of meetings to speak to papers if they can make a valuable contribution, and committees currently do this on a regular basis.

### **4) Communication**

#### **a) The 'owners' of information are best placed to ensure that this information is communicated to those who need it**

Committees are not suitable vehicles for the effective communication of information across the School, and it would be wrong to expect them to fulfil this function for which they are clearly not designed. It is the responsibility of the Committee Secretary to ensure that if someone provides a paper for a committee, and is not then at the committee meeting to hear the outcome of any discussion, they are told what has happened. However, the owner of a policy/procedure etc is by far the best person to know who else in the School needs to be informed about it, and is therefore responsible for making sure that this is done.

#### **b) Committees with Chairs and membership in common**

Where more than one committee has an interest in a particular area, the membership of committees is designed to ensure that there is some level of overlapping membership. It is reasonable to expect members who are on both committees to share with one committee the outcome of any discussion at the other committee. In addition to this, Chairs of committees have been chosen for the same reason. Wherever possible, committees that have areas in common are chaired by the same individual. It is intended that this should ensure the exchange of information between, and continuity across, committees which deal with related business. Committee Secretaries also have a responsibility to liaise with Chairs and other Committee Secretaries to ensure that papers move through the committee structure in an appropriate way, and that there is clarity in relation to which items are dealt with by each committee.

**5) Negotiation**

School committees are not a mechanism for negotiating with the senior executives of the School. There are formal mechanisms in place for such negotiations, and committees are not one of them.