

Access Statement:

Main Building, SOAS, University of London Thornhaugh Street, Russell Square, WC1H 0XG

The main building at SOAS consists of three interlinked buildings: College Buildings, Phillips Building & the Research block.

The main building is relatively modern and fairly accessible overall, though wheelchair users and some others might need some help with the current main entrance door as most people find it heavy (but usually there is a fairly steady stream of people coming through who usually hold the door open for others). The revolving door tends to move rather swiftly.

Entrance

The main entrance labelled College Buildings has a small flight of steps to a rectangular platform where there is a revolving door and a swing door. There is a z-shaped ramp to the right of the steps as one faces the building.

The ramp is quite long but has level platforms at suitable intervals.

Once at the top of the ramp one must cross the full width of the platform, which has some tactile paving.

Inside the main wooden doors there is a revolving glass door and to the left hand side a swing door, which may be easier to use.

The swing door is heavy and is not currently automated. There is a fairly constant stream of foot traffic and people will usually hold the door open for each other.

Note: SOAS is aware that the platform and swing door are relatively inaccessible at present. We were expecting to relocate the main entrance, but plans have changed, so we are now looking at ways to make the entrance more accessible.

Reception

The main reception desk is at low level. Visitors need to sign in there and then show their visitor label at the security barrier to be let through.

The security officers at the barrier do try to anticipate the needs of disabled people (where the impairment is apparent to an observer) and to open the wider security gate when that is appropriate, but sometimes the officer is occupied with another customer(s), so your patience is appreciated.

Beyond the security barrier is the entrance to the Students' Union, the first lift, the main foyer, and the stairwell.

Vertical Access

The main building complex has seven floors and several lifts – only the pair of larger lifts (C and D) at the far end of the main corridor (near the Library entrance) go all the way from the basement (lower ground) to the 5th floor. Among the other lifts, lift E is also large; remaining lifts are smaller and limited in their service and go from the basement to the 4th floor. Two lifts are situated in the main foyer.

All of the lifts in this building complex are suitable for a standard manual wheelchair, but powerchair users will probably need to use the larger lifts, either near the main entrance (lift E) or near the Library entrance (lifts C and D).

There are multiple flights of stairs from which one can access the various levels of the building. The main staircase opens off the main foyer which is behind the security barrier, near reception. Other staircases are in various locations, often at the corners of the building. Staircases 4 and 5 are the only ones that go to the 5th floor. Staircase 3 goes to the 3rd floor only.

Emergency Refuges

There are multiple designated refuge spaces around the main building complex, you should go to the one nearest to you when the emergency alarm goes off. See Appendix for the Emergency Evacuation Procedure.

The refuge locations include the foyer area adjacent to the main staircase on levels 1-4. Most refuges have a two-way communication device so you can make the emergency control aware of your presence and (where appropriate) be reassured that someone is coming to help.

A **manual evacuation chair** is available in College building. It is kept in the store area behind reception and can be brought to other locations as needed, provided it is safe for someone to bring it to the location. All evacuation chairs are serviced annually and the security officers have been trained in their use.

Access to teaching rooms

Almost all teaching rooms are accessible, thanks to good vertical and horizontal access within the building. One exception is the large Khalilli Lecture Theatre which has only a small area available at the very back of the room for wheelchair users. There is a ramp to the left side of the room, but it has a very steep gradient. It does not have a raised edge or a handrail and it is therefore not safe for wheelchair access.

Induction Loops

The Khalilli Lecture theatre (KLT) has a “built-in” hearing induction loop. G2 in the Phillips Building has an infra-red system. For G2 the receiver needs to be obtained from the AV Technicians in room L50.

There is a portable set of equipment available for loan from the SOAS Disability Office which is based at Vernon Square. This can be brought to Russell Square, but at least one day's notice is required.

Toilets

The ground floor **women's toilets** are inside the security barrier and in the main foyer, right next to the main stairs. Those on the ground floor are the busiest ladies' toilets and there is also a very tight turn just inside due to the curtain wall, so unlikely to be suitable for a wheelchair user. Other women's toilets are in the same position (adjacent to main stairs) on levels 2 & 4.

The **men's toilets** are on levels 1 & 3 in this same position, adjacent to the main stairs.

There are **wheelchair accessible toilets** on the ground level to the fourth floor, all immediately adjacent to the main stairs and in the basement between the SU Bar and the Cafeteria. There is no wheelchair accessible toilet on the 5th floor.

There is a pair of **gender-neutral toilet cubicles** immediately off the corridor in the basement near to the Post Room. Anyone who wishes to use these is welcome to do so; we regret due to very small size they are not suitable for wheelchair users.

Facilities within the building

The **SOAS Library** forms a major part of this building and has its own access guide. There are 2 lifts in the library (lifts A and B) but they are relatively small and heavily used. Generally speaking access to the recently refurbished ground level is good, other levels have yet to be refurbished and remain in their original state, so the shelves are very close together and generally there is a lack of circulation space. For this reason, we ask wheelchair users not to go to Levels A-D and to make use of the book fetching service provided by the Reader Services staff.

The **Staff Common Room** is on the 1st floor and can be accessed by lift. The corridor to the SCR is quite narrow, but a manual wheelchair can pass through as long as pedestrian will wait their turn.

There are various **IT suites and language laboratories** which are generally accessible, though circulation space may be limited. Much assistive software is networked.

The **Gymnasium** is in the basement of the building and it is, regrettably, not accessible to wheelchair users as it is down three flights of stairs from the Lower Ground floor, then along a relatively narrow corridor.

Assistance dogs

Assistance dogs are welcome, please ask your host to arrange drinking water for the dog. There is a grassy area immediately outside the building which can be used for toileting if necessary, please pick up after your animal where applicable.

Appendix

The Emergency Evacuation Plan for College Buildings & Phillips Building.

The following plan applies to visitors. Staff and students who require assisted emergency egress should have their Personal Emergency Egress Plan agreed with the Disability Advisor or Diversity Advisor.

If you are able to exit the building unassisted, please do so via the nearest available route and with appropriate speed. Do not use the lifts.

If you are able to exit without assistance, *but* need more time than other people to do so, please move first to a refuge point (see signage on stair landings) and wait for others to clear your floor. Once the route is clear, follow at a pace which is comfortable for you and report to the assembly point when you reach the ground.

If you are not able to use the stairs to exit the building please follow these instructions:

1. When the alarm rings, if you are **on the ground floor** of the building:
 - Remember that the main exit has steps and you will need to use the side ramp
 - move as quickly as you can to one of the exits.
 - Exit and move away from the building to the proper assembly point.
 - Security or fire marshalls will sweep the building to ensure it is evacuated and will advise the lead fire marshal on exiting.

OR

1. When the alarm rings, if you are **above ground** level (floors 1-5):
 - move as quickly as you can to one of the designated refuge spaces (see labels on staircases and landings).
 - If you have a support worker, they should accompany you.
 - At the refuge, you should use the call button on the communication device to let the Main Reception know where you are. (Alternatively, dial 555 on any internal phone) Please state what assistance you require. The person responding will inform you whether you need to evacuate or not.
 - The description of your location should be on the sign at the call point.
 - If the internal phones are inoperable, please use a mobile to call the SOAS emergency number which is 0207 898 4459.
 - If you cannot reach the SOAS numbers please call the emergency services direct on 999.
2. You and the assistant (using the evac+chair if necessary) should make your way down the staircase as quickly as you are able to manage safely.
3. Go to the usual assembly point and make sure that the person in charge has noted that you and your assistant are both safely out of the building.
4. Security or fire marshalls will sweep the building to ensure it is evacuated and will advise the lead fire marshal on exiting.

OR

OR

If you are in the **basement (LG)**

1. When the alarm rings: go to the exit doors adjacent to the Post Room and the main double lifts (if you have a support worker, they should accompany you).
This door has a ramp to the service road on the west side of the building.
2. You and any assistant should make your way down the ramp and then go to the usual assembly point and make sure that the person in charge has noted that you and your assistant are both safely out of the building.
3. Security or fire marshalls will sweep the building to ensure it is evacuated and will advise the lead fire marshal on exiting.