SOAS Strategy 2026-30

May 2025

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1 SOAS vision and mission

Purpose and how we aim to achieve it

SOAS' context and changing environment

- SOAS has always been about understanding the Global South (Africa, Asia and Middle East) but our imperatives and purpose have evolved over time.
- When the institution was founded, it was designed to help understand the colonies of the empire – its cultures and languages.
- Subsequently, as the people of those colonies joined SOAS, it became driven by their understanding of the Global South, its post-colonial transitions and democratisations, bringing to SOAS new disciplines.
- Globalisation has resulted in new transnational challenges and SOAS has intellectually evolved again to become about researching and teaching on these challenges through the lens of the Global South.

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SOAS' vision and mission

To be an excellent research-intensive university that responds to the learning needs of our diverse students. We will enable an equitably grounded global academy as a means to challenge hierarchies of knowledge and assist in the building of a socially just future.

We do this through teaching and research on the arts, humanities and social sciences as they relate to and are expressed in Africa, Asia and the Middle East. Our graduates develop knowledge and skills that are globally competitive, comparatively oriented and contextually grounded.

Teaching & Learning:
We are committed to delivering academically outstanding and inclusive on-campus and online education through innovative curricula and pedagogies, and a focus on student experience.

Research & Knowledge Exchange:
We consider some of the most urgent challenges of our time. Inherently inter-disciplinary, we value deep partnerships with scholars from the regions and diasporas of SOAS' focus.

Community:
Our success is defined by the quality and commitment of all our staff and students.

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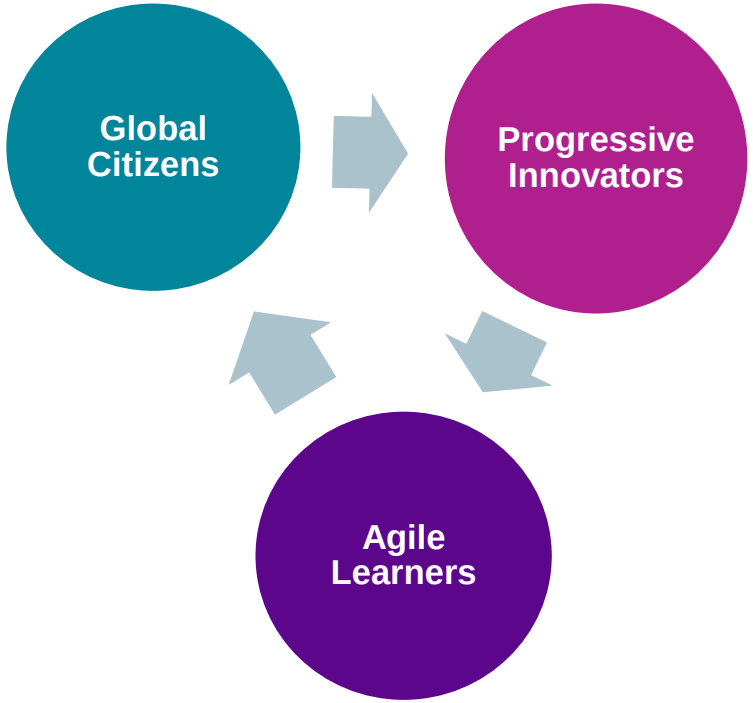
Graduate attributes – how are SOAS' students unique?

- Globally competent
- Contextually grounded
- Culturally, socially and environmentally responsible



- Critical thinkers and creative practitioners
- Imaginative proactive changemakers
- Skilled communicators and effective collaborators

- Academically capable
- Comparatively oriented
- Digitally fluent

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SOAS' values

SOAS has nine values that were adopted long before the 2021-25 Strategy.

These can be captured by four value statements:

Promoting equality and celebrating diversity

Protecting academic freedom and freedom of speech

Advancing curiosity, collegiality and creativity

Living within sustainable environments locally and globally and caring for others

We need to enable these value statements in our processes and embed them in our working practices.

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2 Continuities between our Strategies

Outcomes of SOAS 2021-25 and successes we want to carry forward into 2026-30

Political economy of higher education

- Until this millennium, UK higher education (HE) was a state-funded sector.
- We were less driven by the imperatives of raising income and more preoccupied by the intellectual questions of our disciplines and the imperatives of the state.
- However, the political economy of HE changed partially in 2006 and substantively in 2012 through the introduction of fees.
- The consequence for universities was that funding became an essential focus.
- Intellectual and pedagogical questions, and the political imperatives of both the state and stakeholders within institutions, had to be balanced with the need to develop income.

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SOAS Strategy 2021-25: Context

- The focus of the 2021-25 Strategy was to address the managerial conundrum of reconciling financial sustainability with teaching excellence and maintaining research intensity.
- This was to be done through:
  - Increasing student numbers (and therefore tuition fee income), research grants and philanthropy
  - Creating (or reestablishing in part) organizational effectiveness
- This Strategy was successful in some elements and remained significantly challenged in others.

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SOAS Strategy 2021-25: Successes

- Our biggest success has been the stabilisation of finances, with multimillion pound surpluses in all years.
- Our in-classroom teaching experience is consistently rated highly by students.
- Another highlight has been growth in research.
- Other successes have included:
  - Investments in the estate and core IT infrastructure
  - Improvements in diversity of staff profile
  - Pioneering of new partnerships strategy
  - Better efficiencies in Estates, Finance, Marketing and Student Recruitment, Advancement and institutional Governance
  - Establishment of Colleges
- We have also improved the management of institutional fractures and polarisation, bringing this in line with other university practices.

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SOAS Strategy 2021-25: Remaining challenges

1. The completion of our IT programmes is a multiyear agenda and requires sequencing and prioritisation. As a result, the most significant investment - the student records system - is still in progress, to be completed in 2026. This is key to improving administrative efficiencies, the co-ordination between functions, and the value of student data to advance all objectives of the institution.

2. Finances improved dramatically in this period, but the projected UG/PGT student profile was not achieved. An increase in UG students was required to achieve the same net income, generating higher academic and administrative workloads.

3. There is still considerable room for improvement in student responsiveness and staff morale, as reflected in both the NSS and the staff surveys. The challenge was aggravated by the loss of institutional memory from the transformation process and the transition until the investment in IT and improved processes is realised.

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SOAS Strategy 2026-30: Teaching & Learning

- Every programme at SOAS will be appropriate for the student body, taught with world class pedagogy.
- Every programme at SOAS will be infused with expertise from the global south.
- We are enhancing the viability of specialist subject areas through innovation and partnerships.
- SOAS will create new programmes and a refreshed delivery model for online learning that supports growth in the student body.
- Every student at SOAS will be given global opportunities to learn and engage with our areas of expertise.
- We are committed to an outstanding student experience and to achieving an excellent TEF outcome in 2027.
- We will embed Education for Sustainable Development in the SOAS curriculum to ensure all students gain key competencies for sustainability.

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SOAS Strategy 2026-30: Research & Knowledge Exchange

- We aim to continue our significant success in research growth, quality and grants.
- In addition, we will do the following:
  - Respond to the challenges brought by changing geopolitical and funding arrangements by diversifying our research funding sources
  - Continue to explore equitable partnerships in research and knowledge exchange that challenge established hierarchies of knowledge
- We increased our research income from £6.5m in 2021 to £10m in 2024. We have set a combined target for research grants and contracts and enterprise activities of £24m by 2030.
- We aim to build on our stellar REF21 performance for excellence in REF 2029.
- We will also review and reshape our research institutes and centres.

Research Income

RKE income target for 2030

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SOAS Strategy 2026-30: Institutional effectiveness & community

We will focus on the following:

- Continue the promotion of strategic leadership, and good governance and management practices
- Focus on individual and team performance, rewarding and celebrating achievements
- Create new programmes to support leaders in fostering a high-performance culture, enhance the staff experience, and strengthen the performance development review process
- Focus on organisational effectiveness, especially procedural efficiencies in Registry and HR
- Continue our IT programmes so administrative systems can be improved
- Expand equitable partnerships as a new source of income and to make higher education more accessible to students in Africa, Asia and the Middle East
- Invest in building a strong reputation and growing philanthropy (especially for scholarships)
- Embed still further our commitments to equality, diversity and inclusion
- Build an understanding of AI's role in shaping and strengthening our activities

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3 New initiatives

New focus areas for SOAS 2026-30

1. Growing student numbers and PGT focus
2. Achieving the PGT focus
3. Reprioritisation of expenditure
4. Partnerships
5. Reviewing academic structure and voice
6. Sustainability to safeguard our planet

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1. Growing student numbers and PGT focus

- SOAS will remain focused on growing its on-campus student numbers to 6,500 (this is limited by workloads and other capacity constraints like estates).
- This may be supplemented by growth of up to 1,800 ODL students and 1,000 partnership students by 2030.
- We will enable ODL growth through consolidation (SOAS currently offers 24 programmes, more than any other UK university, which will be reduced to around 15).
- We will try to keep UG constant in absolute terms and grow our PG proportion; our focus on UG will be to stabilize by, for example, introducing placement years.
- Our aspiration for our UG:PG ratio is 50:50.
- All Colleges and Departments are also encouraged to develop alternative income streams including research income, knowledge exchange and executive education.
- Continual review and agility will be a primary principle of executive stewardship.

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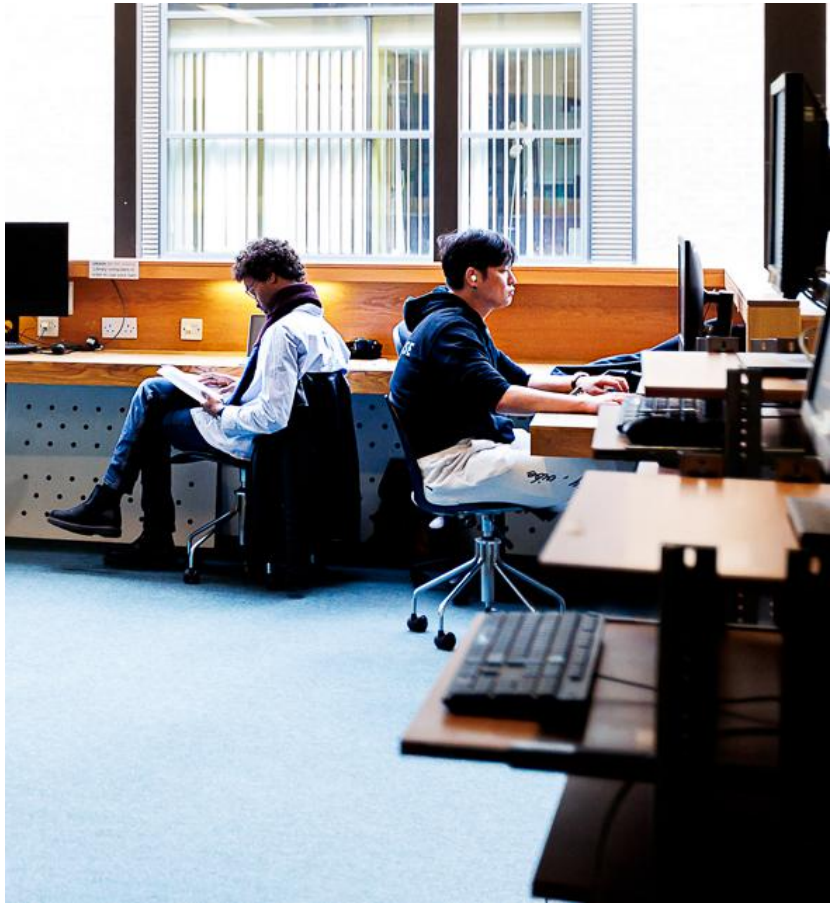
2. Achieving the PGT Focus

- PGT growth will require focused efforts in what has become a challenging national and global higher education market.
- It will be enabled through the introduction of attractive, new PGT programmes such as MSc Sustainability, MSc Data Science, MA History and Politics, LLM Maritime Law and the introduction of subject trends via new modules (e.g. AI, Sustainability).
- We will also focus on additional interventions such as programme reorganisation and additional recruitment cycles.
- But PGT growth will also require a much larger proportion of scholarships to be sourced from both internal resources and external philanthropy (SOAS has sufficient demand for PGT studies but costs act as a barrier).

- In the first years of the Strategy, scholarships including subsistence will only be available through external donors while internal resources will prioritise tuition costs.
- We aim to make available 75-100 additional scholarships in year 1, 150-200 in year 2, and 300 in year 3.
- Further scholarships will be made available through philanthropy which will play an increasingly prominent role.
- Two mechanisms: scholarships, fee waivers.
- Scholarships will be used to drive growth, focus on regions, and focus on certain disciplines to address workloads.
- This will all be done with prudence and annual review.



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3. Reprioritisation of expenditure

There are two elements in the reprioritisation of expenditure to align with the Strategy.

1. Identifying internal resources for scholarships

- Significant existing expenditure is directed to enabling the recruitment of and support for UG students.
- Includes programmes associated with APSS, Foundation Year, and other forms of academic and pastoral care.
- While this will continue, a better balance will be established to enable recruitment of and support for PGT students in alignment with the strategy.

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3. Reprioritisation of expenditure

There are two elements in the reprioritisation of expenditure to align with the Strategy.

2. Proportion of institutional expenditure between academic and professional services

- Benchmark analysis by Etios has shown that SOAS' academic contribution is 52.5% of Core Income which is 1.4% higher than the sector average.
- SOAS' professional services is larger in some departments than the sector average.
- This reflects SOAS' small size and resulting diseconomies of scale, London location, social justice commitments (including insourcing and financial support for marginalised students) and an IT transition which continues to necessitate some manual manual processes.
- While our social justice obligations and London presence remain sacrosanct, we recognise that a measured reconsideration of professional services (through natural turnover, for example) may be appropriate once our IT programmes are fully implemented.
- A review of the benchmark analysis will be undertaken at the end of 2027 with a view to establishing a more sector-aligned professional services balance in 2028.

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4. Partnerships – three distinct types

1. Traditional

- Dual degrees, progression agreements, articulation agreements, etc.
- Intended to enhance SOAS' academic and research stature or other objectives, and drive PGT recruitment
- Based on our existing business model of domestic and international fees

2. Developmental

- Purpose is to lend support to and enhance capacity of partners, particularly in Africa, Asia and the Middle East
- Only entered into if funded by donors and/or other mechanisms

3. Equitable

- SOAS' exploration of equitable teaching collaborations is defined by co-development, co-teaching and co-accreditation of academic programmes
- Targeted at entering new markets at new price points to enable income growth
- Requires reducing SOAS' labour costs (through joint teaching with carefully selected institutions) and scaling student numbers
- We aim to expand our definition of equitable partnerships to include equitable research collaborations and civic society contributions

Some partnerships will involve a mix of models or will evolve over time from one model to another.

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5. Reviewing academic structure and voice

During 2021-25 we established three colleges. Two of these colleges – **CoHum** and **CoDEF** – have bedded down well and are strategically and operationally efficient. **CoLAP** has not been as successfully operationalized given the nature of its disciplines and the size of its departments.

The Strategy gives us an opportunity to reconfigure the Colleges around **Humanities, Social Sciences, Law**. This college structure is easily recognisable in the sector.

The College of Humanities will include:

- Anthropology, Media and Gender
- Art
- History, Religions and Philosophies
- Languages, Cultures and Linguistics

The College of Social Sciences will include:

- Development Studies
- Economics
- Finance and Management
- Politics and International Studies

The College of Law will be standalone and elevate the SOAS brand as a Law School.

Independent of these structural reconfigurations, academic voice will be enhanced by greater academic and non-portfolio representation on college management structures and Senate committees.

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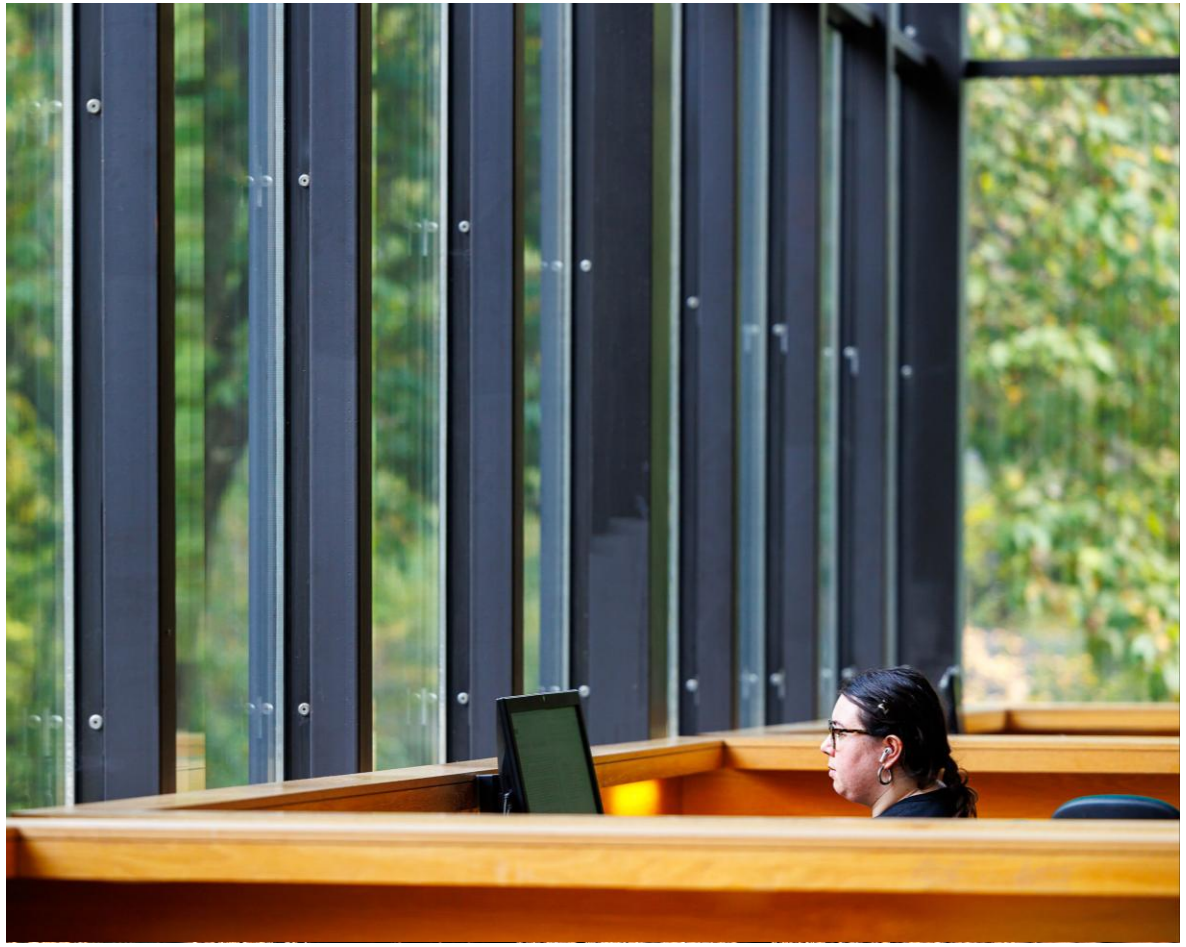
6. Sustainability to safeguard our planet



- SOAS is approaching sustainability from a comprehensive perspective, with a focus on its internal environment, research orientation, and teaching to promote climate justice and environmental sustainability.
- SOAS is in the top 20 universities for SDG11 (sustainable cities and communities) and we will build on the results of our commitment to this and other SDGs.
- We will be Net Zero by 2040 as an institution, the main focus being on procurement which accounts for 85% of our carbon footprint.
- We will also focus on the sustainability of our own institution through reliable income generation, sound financial and people management, and ethical and strategic leadership.

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Strategic pillars of SOAS Strategy 2026-30

- Continue enhancing student experience through a focus on NSS and academic advising
- Continue our success in research growth, quality and grants
- Grow income through dramatically increasing our proportion of PGT students
- Reimagine social inclusion to align with our Strategy
- Diversify income through expanding executive education, CPD, ODL and philanthropy
- Open up new markets through equitable partnerships
- Improve administrative efficiencies over the lifecycle of the Strategy
- Review academic structure and voice
- Embed sustainability to safeguard our planet

All these initiatives will will be regularly monitored by Senate and the Board.

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SOAS Strategy Map

Institutional Strategic Interventions

1. Reorganise colleges
2. Complete IT investment
3. Introduce attractive new PGT programmes
4. Increase project-based learning & internships
5. Increase PGT scholarships
6. Increase student support for PGT
7. Review & reshape research institutes & centres
8. Strengthen performance management processes
9. Increase non-portfolio academics on committees
10. Increase total students to 6,500
11. Grow research & knowledge exchange income
12. Implement ODL & grow executive ed & philanthropy
13. Grow equitable partnerships

Efficient & effective administration

Increase in proportion of PGT students to 50%

Better balance between academic & professional services expenditure (2028)

Equitable & fair fulfillment of workload obligations

Enhancement of academic voice

Growth in income

Expansion into new markets

Strategic Goals (actions will be further detailed in departmental and portfolio implementation plans)

Excellent student support throughout student journey

Attractive academic portfolio & state of the art pedagogy

Increase in global classroom, study abroad, etc.

Balanced workloads that enable time for research

Active, visible research institutes & centres

Dynamic, empowering research culture & environment

Strong, inclusive community

Financial wellness

World-class, internationalized student experience

High productivity in high-quality global & regional research

Sector-leading organisational stability

World-leading teaching & research on Africa, Asia & the Middle East

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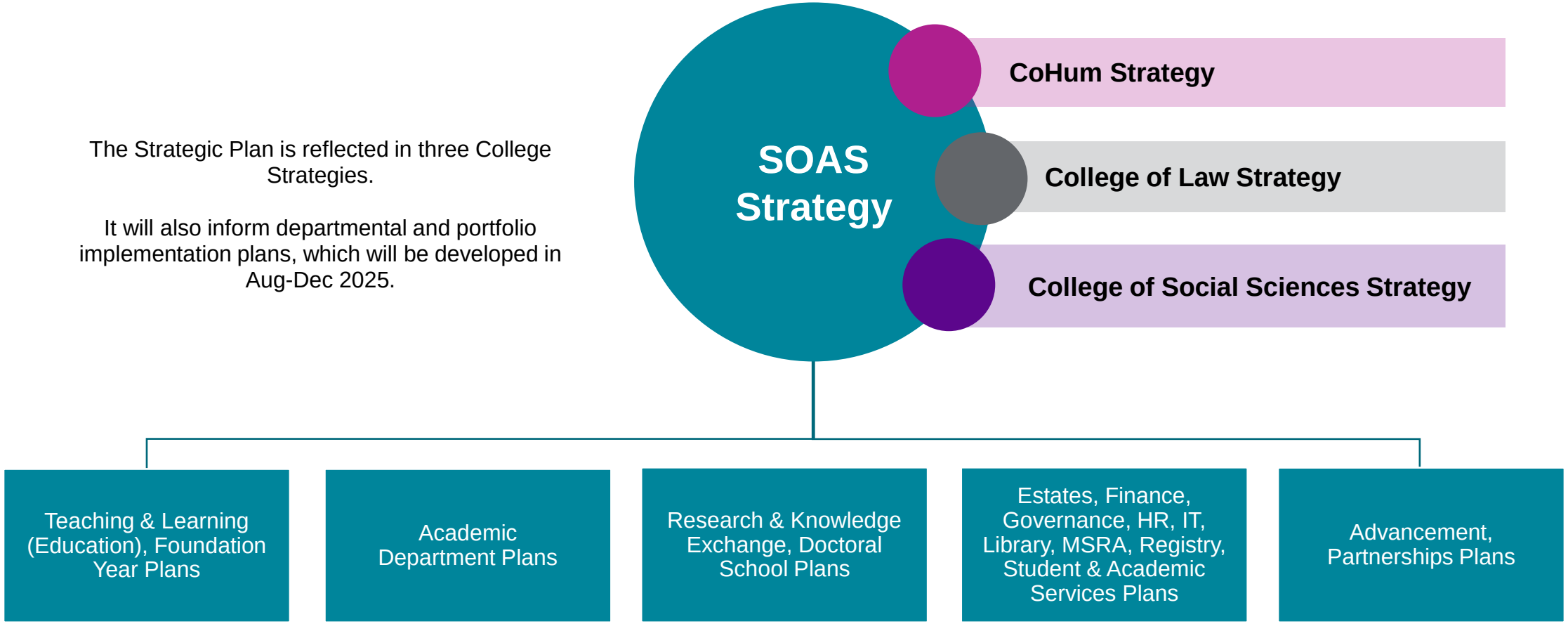
Departmental and portfolio implementation plans

The Strategic Plan is reflected in three College Strategies.

It will also inform departmental and portfolio implementation plans, which will be developed in Aug-Dec 2025.



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4 College footprints

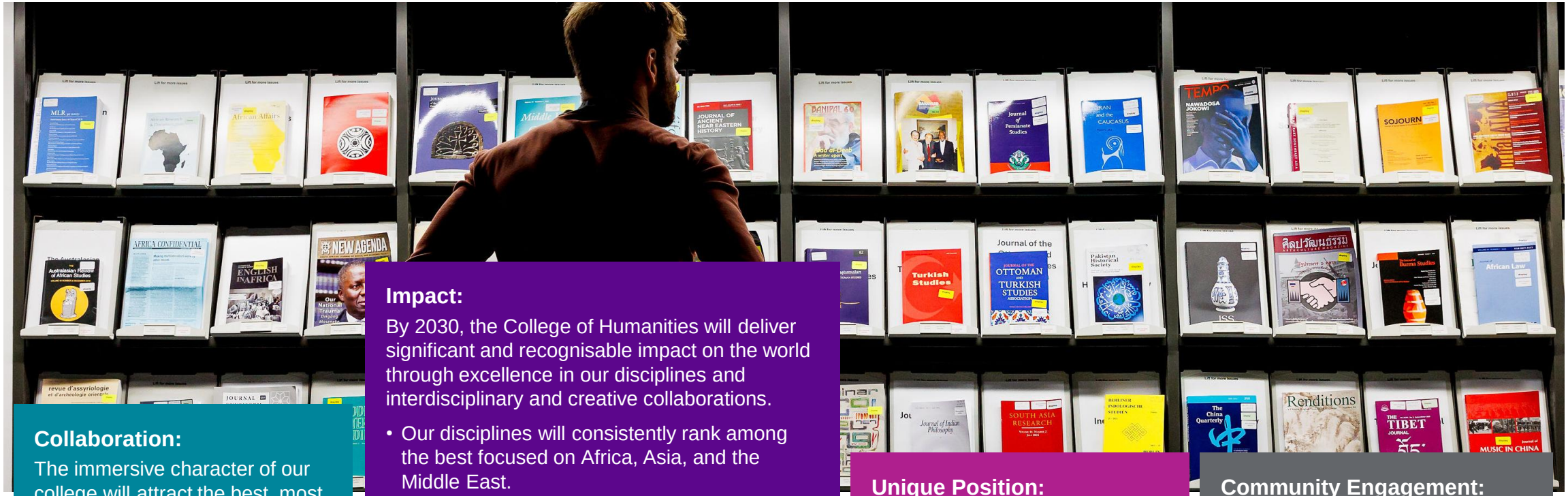
College of Humanities

College of Law

College of Social Sciences

College of Humanities Strategy - 2030 Vision

We will be recognised as the pre-eminent place for critical, interdisciplinary scholarship that explores human culture, expression and experience, with a focus on our shared understanding of Africa, Asia and the Middle East, and their diasporas, and working closely with law and the social sciences.



Collaboration:

The immersive character of our college will attract the best, most novel researchers. We will empower students to take creative risks and embark on unexpected journeys.

Impact:

By 2030, the College of Humanities will deliver significant and recognisable impact on the world through excellence in our disciplines and interdisciplinary and creative collaborations.

- Our disciplines will consistently rank among the best focused on Africa, Asia, and the Middle East.
- These disciplines will be shaped by deep partnerships in these regions, clearly differentiated from our comparators across the global north.

Unique Position:

Few institutions can rigorously and comprehensively examine the humanities from such diverse perspectives and positions.

Community Engagement:

We will provide spaces in the heart of London for cultural expression, dialogue, civic engagement, and community building.

College of Humanities Strategy and Goals

Research Culture

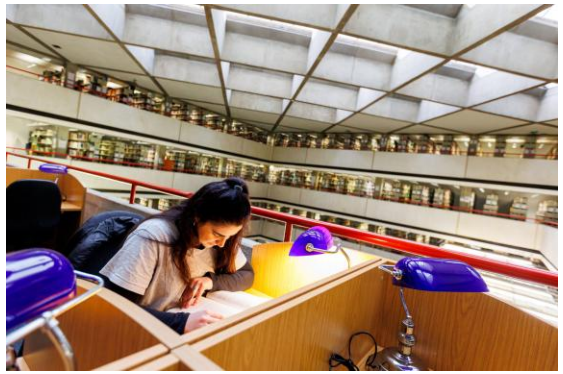
- Reinforce our research culture to deliver excellent REF2029 results, increase grant capture and to understand and change the world.
- Create a sustainable and externally recognised research environment.
- Provide training and support tailored to particular opportunities for impact in our disciplines.
- Nurture focused areas of research strength, supported by new research clusters, looking to the future.
- Embed postgraduate researchers across our research activities and support them as research-led educators and change makers.
- Maximise recovery of staff time through QR and grant capture, with transparent expectations of all research activities.
- Growth in our postgraduate portfolio, particularly in professional preparation, will deliver a 50:50 UG/PGT ratio, strongly connecting our research to our teaching.

Unified Humanities Curriculum

- Studying our subjects in combination will be a distinctive part of the college's brand.
- Remove the burdens of complexity while being true to our vision, history, our disciplines and students at all levels of study.
- Average module enrolments will increase across the college, reducing pressures on the timetable and increasing resilience.
- Language teaching will be standardised, distinctive, underpinned by our research, delivered in partnership, and will continue to challenge whilst being accessible to all.
- We will teach what our students need and want to learn, in ways they can access, always grounded in our research and conscious of the needs of employers and society.
- AI and other technologies will inform our modules, ensuring our graduates are equipped to see the human in their increasingly digital worlds.

London in the World, the World in London

- Embed London in our teaching and research, providing unique opportunities for our disciplines.
- Showcase our gallery, collections, studios, performances and events.
- Link London to the world through partnerships, placing our college at the centre of key transnational debates and civic engagement.
- Leverage digital connectivity and partnerships to provide education that reaches new audiences.
- Showcase our role in worldmaking through our unique perspectives.



Bespoke Enterprise Projects

- Deliver bespoke enterprise projects as a core part of our income, providing capacity-building consultancy in area studies, and innovative education programmes.
- Alongside NGOs and government bodies we will build links in the private sector, with an emphasis on cultural competency linked to our disciplinary expertise.
- Develop research consultancy to increase impact, closely aligned to REF2029 impact case studies.

Philanthropy

- Sustain our unique qualities through specialist expertise, supported by philanthropy.
- Our alumni will play a central role in our future, as advocates, advisors, and supporters, helping to tell our story and inform our future.

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College of Law Strategy

Vision: "Legal Excellence, Global Impact"

The College of Law aspires to strengthen its reputation as a globally recognised centre of excellence—offering a world-class LLB to train the future of the legal profession, fostering a vibrant community of postgraduate scholars, and advancing innovative legal research that responds to the most important global challenges of our time. We are dedicated to developing exceptional legal minds under the guidance of internationally distinguished faculty, equipping our graduates to lead with integrity, global perspective, and meaningful impact across diverse legal systems.

The strategy provides for managed growth of the College to match its ambitions to be one of the world's preeminent law schools, to continue to produce the highest standard of research excellence in the field, informed by SOAS' global perspective (its USP), and to establish strong college business practices towards achieving a greater level of financial sustainability and administrative robustness.

Sustainable Growth

- We aim to grow our LLM programme by 30% by establishing additional specialisms, introducing a January Entry route, and realigning presentation of existing offerings.
- We aim to increase the total LLB/BA cohort by maintaining the current high level of UG recruitment year on year over two more recruitment cycles. More significant growth would expose us to disruption when home UG market declines in 2030.
- UG growth will be accompanied by improvements in student experience through adjusting teaching delivery and tailoring the law curriculum.
- We will increase clinical and vocational offerings on both UG and PG programmes to improve our sector competitiveness.
- We will actively pursue traditional PG articulation agreements with HEIs in key markets while pursuing a limited number of cost-effective equitable partnerships.

Industry Engagement

- The College of Law will invest resources in establishing and maintaining closer relationships with key partners in legal practice, such as law firms, chambers, NGOs and other organisations for the benefit of clinical teaching, student career mentoring, graduate career prospects and knowledge exchange.

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College of Law Strategy

The College of Law is committed to fostering a dynamic and supportive environment for learning, teaching and research that empowers academic staff, doctoral researchers and taught degree students to thrive. Focusing on impactful research on contemporary, pressing global issues, alongside outstanding training of legal professionals, the College of Law will be recognised globally for academic rigor and thought leadership in the discipline.

Research

- We will increase research capacity by providing structured time, resources, and incentives for scholarly activity. We will review academic workloads to ensure protected time for research, while offering targeted support through mentoring schemes and support for early-stage work.
- We aim to enhance research skills by expanding training in grant writing, collaboration, and impact development. New initiatives will support researchers in securing competitive funding, while an internal peer-review process will improve application quality.
- We will increase doctoral research support by enhancing supervision support, providing career development programmes (including enhanced teaching and research training), and integrating PG researchers into wider college research activities.
- We will enhance the visibility of our research through strategic communications, partnerships, and participation in global networks.

Teaching & Learning

- We plan to re-envision our teaching delivery of large modules to respond to the changing landscape of student needs, sector trends and professional requirements.
- We will grow our Clinical Legal Education programme by building capacity for establishing and maintaining industry partners, advancing our CLE curriculum, and administering clinical offerings at UG and PG level.
- As a single-discipline college, the College of Law will introduce and improve discipline-specific initiatives, such as a new law-specific teacher training programme and more extensive legal skills laboratory for UG students.

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College of Social Sciences Strategy

The vision for the College of Social Sciences is to be a leader in scholarship and impact for a fair and sustainable world through enterprising global engagement with SOAS' social justice agenda and to do so through the lens of the Global South without losing sight of continuously shifting global interdependencies.

The strategy is to drive income and manage workloads by:

- Consolidating key activities through innovations across curriculum and pedagogy
- Rebalancing PGT/UG ratios (in ECO, POL and SFM)
- Driving online enrolment growth (by consolidating, refreshing and innovating and by linking SOAS' research excellence to its online offer)
- Diversifying income away from disproportionate reliance on OS PGT fee income towards increasing UG OS and non-traditional teaching income (such as bespoke executive education and short courses)
- Driving research income (including QR) and improving research recovery rates

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College of Social Sciences Strategy

UG on-campus programmes

Grow UG enrolments in key areas with a focus on BSc Finance and Accounting.

Consolidate UG enrolments in Politics, Economics, Development Studies and Management by continuous pedagogical and curriculum innovation.

Grow UG OS enrolments across all disciplines in the CoSS.

PGT on-campus programmes

Refresh our existing programmes to align better with urgent contemporary challenges. Integrate academic and applied elements of post-graduate training. Launch new programmes in the following areas:

- Data Sciences
- Sustainability
- Inequality

Refresh our existing PGT and expand our short course (CPD) online offer to reflect SOAS' unique value proposition.

Online programmes

Refresh our existing PGT and expand our short course (CPD) online offer to reflect SOAS' unique value proposition.

Executive Education

Develop bespoke executive education programmes for multiple type of stakeholders, across multiple fields.

Partnerships

Expand our footprint in traditional partnerships.

Consolidate a select number of equitable partnerships.

Invest in a development partnership focused on capacity building.

Research

Increase grant capture via a deliberate strategy of bid development.

Increase the absolute and relative share of 3 and 4 star publications.

Increase international co-authorship.

Consolidate our intellectual leadership in a set of key areas by building a staff profile from PhD to post-doc, Early Career T&R and Chair.

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