

Sexual and Gender Based Violence Policy			
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Related documents:	SOAS Dignity and Respect Policy Staff Grievance Policy Staff Disciplinary Policy Student Disciplinary Procedure Report and Support Webpage Personal Relationships Policy Public Complaints Procedure		
Documents replaced:	HR-101-01 Sexual and Gender Based Violence Policy		
<p><i>Note: All policies must be read in conjunction with all other SOAS policy, procedure and guidance documents. Printed copies of policies may not be the most up to date, therefore please refer to the policy pages on the SOAS external website or intranet for the latest version.</i></p>			

1. Overview

- 1.1. SOAS affirms that every member of our community has the right to work and study in an environment free from sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV).
- 1.2. SOAS exists in a world in which oppression and marginalisation based on gender is widespread. Tackling SGBV is necessary to change the structural inequality that exists within the academy and society.
- 1.3. SOAS recognises the intersectional nature of abuse and acknowledges that sexuality, disability, racial and gender identity can compound these oppressions. Experiences of SGBV often intersect with other forms of discrimination and harassment. We recognise that SGBV is a serious and pervasive societal issue, including within higher education, and commit to tackling it as part of our core values.
- 1.4. This policy aims to provide a framework for an institutional response to sexual and gender-based violence at SOAS. It seeks to enable everyone to have a role in safeguarding our community, through the provision of clear information on how to act when we witness or are made aware of incidents of SGBV.
- 1.5. The ethos of this policy is aligned with the SOAS 2026 - 2030 EDIW Plan that we are *One SOAS: Diverse by nature, inclusive by design*, and this policy contributes to that inclusivity.
- 1.6. This policy operates alongside other relevant institutional policies, including but not limited to the SOAS Dignity and Respect Policy and SOAS Personal Relationships Policy. It will be accessible on our website and on SOAS Report and Support.

- 1.7. The policy is based on the following principles:
- Survivor Centred: we centre our approach on the rights and experiences of survivors.
 - Trauma Informed: we prioritise consent, safety, trust and choice wherever possible. We work to allow survivors to make empowered choices about their experience and healing.
 - Community Accountability: within the SOAS community, members are mutually responsible to and accountable for one another.
- 1.8. This policy applies to all staff (temporary and permanent), contractors, students and third parties (including those with honorary titles, alumni and board members). It also includes situations which have been witnessed as well as experienced directly.
- 1.9. This policy relates specifically to sexual and gender-based violence, how SOAS seeks to prevent SGBV and how we support those involved in reports of SGBV. Our Dignity and Respect policy sets out our overarching approach to bullying, harassment and discrimination, including references to teaching, learning and freedom of speech, and should be read in conjunction with this policy.
- 1.10. This policy supports SOAS in complying with Office for Students Condition E6 on preventing harassment and sexual misconduct, and the Employment Rights Act 2025 on preventing sexual harassment of staff.

2. Definitions

2.1. Sexual Violence

- 2.1.1. Sexual violence is any unwanted sexual act or activity. There are different kinds of sexual violence, including but not restricted to: rape, assault by penetration, sexual assault, child sexual abuse, coercion, 'revenge porn', upskirting, rape and assault within marriage / relationships, sexual exploitation, grooming, forced marriage, so-called honour-based violence, ritual abuse, and domestic abuse.
- 2.1.2. Sexual violence can be psychological as well as physical, including coercive behaviour and control.
- 2.1.3. Stalking is also considered as a form of sexual violence where there is a gendered or sexual element, for example where the stalker is an ex-partner and leaving the victim feeling pestered or scared.

2.2. Sexual misconduct

- 2.2.1. For the purposes of this policy, sexual misconduct refers to behaviours, acts and conduct of a sexual nature which can involve abuse or misuse of power. Sexual misconduct can include comments and non-verbal communication with sexual content or overtones, creation of atmospheres of discomfort, and promised resources in exchange for sexual access.

2.2.2. In the context of the power relations within SOAS and for the purposes of this policy, sexual misconduct more specifically raises issues of unequal relationships, consent, and the prevention of equal access to education, opportunities and career progression. For this reason, SOAS has sought to regulate intimate relationships between staff and students as detailed in the SOAS Personal Relationships Policy.

2.3. Sexual harassment

2.3.1. Sexual Harassment exists in a range of forms from behaviour which seems obvious to more subtle conduct, and the impact is not always realised immediately. It is not only the direct recipient that can be affected by sexual harassment, it can also have an impact on people who see or hear the behaviour or who offer support.

2.3.2. Sexual harassment is any unwanted behaviour of a sexual nature that makes you feel intimidated, humiliated, distressed or degraded. It can take a variety of forms and can include or be called sexualised bullying. Its effects may include creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating, embarrassing, uncomfortable or offensive environment.

2.3.3. 'Of a sexual nature' refers to verbal, non-verbal or physical conduct including:

- unwelcome sexual advances/propositions, flirtations, continuing to make advances after the recipient indicates not being interested
- inappropriate touching,
- sexual jokes, derogatory comments or gestures,
- making someone feel uncomfortable through displaying or sharing sexual material, pornographic photographs, drawings or videos,
- sending direct/instant messages, texts, emails with material of a sexual nature
- catcalling, wolf-whistling, leering, – uninvited comments and noises relating to someone's appearance, sexual availability, body, clothing,
- offers of rewards in return for sexual favours
- asking unwelcome personal questions about someone's sexuality or sex life

2.4. Consent

2.4.1. This policy defines consent as defined in the Sexual Offences Act 2003, which is agreeing by choice and having the freedom and capacity to make that choice.

2.4.2. A person has freedom to consent if no harm would happen to them if they said no. A person is not free to consent if, for example, they fear discontinuation of studies or employment, they are dependent on the other for financial support, they are being threatened with violence or harm, there is an imbalance of power where trust could be abused.

2.4.3. Consent may not be explicit. If someone seems unsure, stays quiet, moves away or does not respond, they have not given their consent.

- 2.4.4. Having capacity to consent means that someone is physically and/or mentally able to make a choice and to understand the consequences of that choice. For example, a person does not have the capacity to give consent if they are drunk or under the influence of drugs, if they are asleep or unconscious, if they have a medical problem, mental health condition or learning disability that limits their ability to consent and/or understand what they are consenting to.

3. Roles and responsibilities

3.1. The University

- 3.1.1. The University has a responsibility to ensure that staff, students and third parties are aware of this policy and commit to preventing SGBV.
- 3.1.2. The University will ensure the policy is made available and embedded into relevant training, contracts and inductions. Preventative training and related measures are in place and will continue to be rolled-out. This includes embedding information in training for new staff, consent training for new students, and Active Bystander Training and Where Do You Draw The Line Training for existing staff.
- 3.1.3. The University is responsible for ensuring there are accessible and widely communicated reporting mechanisms in place, offering different options for various situations.
- 3.1.4. The University will ensure that reports of SGBV are handled sensitively, effectively and efficiently, and where relevant through:
- 3.1.4.1. Report and Support
 - 3.1.4.2. Directly through managers and the Student Safety Team
 - 3.1.4.3. The Student Disciplinary Procedure
 - 3.1.4.4. The Staff Grievance and Disciplinary Policies
 - 3.1.4.5. The Public Complaints Procedure
- 3.1.5. The University will ensure that those who have experienced, witnessed and been accused of SGBV are supported appropriately, and people who will be involved in any investigations of SGBV incidents will receive specific, detailed training to ensure they can provide survivor-centred and trauma-informed support.
- 3.1.6. The University will not use non-disclosure agreements in relation to sexual misconduct.
- 3.1.7. The University will monitor reports and complaints in relation to SGBV and identify any specific patterns and trends, putting relevant actions in place. This will include reviewing our risk assessment (conducted under the Employment Rights Act 2025) on preventing sexual harassment of staff on an annual basis.
- 3.1.8. Data on bullying, harassment and discrimination will be reported annually to the Executive Board and the Board of Trustees for transparency and governance purposes.

3.2. [Managers](#)

- 3.2.1. Managers are responsible for acting on any reports they receive of SGBV. Managers should take appropriate steps, involving HR and the Student Casework Team as and when appropriate. More detailed information on the reporting mechanisms and support available are outlined below.
- 3.2.2. In addition to acting upon incidents that occur, managers are responsible for fostering a safe and inclusive culture. Sexual misconduct can occur as a continuum, with low-level inappropriate behaviours escalating into more serious incidents. Therefore, managers should tackle low-level behaviours appropriately and swiftly, with the aim of preventing any escalation.
- 3.2.3. Managers should ensure their staff undertake appropriate training, and encourage everyone to be an active bystander, fostering a safe and Inclusive culture.

3.3. [Individuals](#)

- 3.3.1. Members of the SOAS community and visitors to SOAS are expected to respect the dignity of others. Any acts of sexual violence, sexual harassment or sexual misconduct, whether in person or online, including in email communication, text messages and via other forms of social media, will be taken seriously and dealt with under the appropriate internal disciplinary procedures. Where appropriate, and with permission, cases can be referred to the police.
- 3.3.2. When safe to do so, we encourage those within the SOAS community to be active bystanders. An active bystander is someone who not only witnesses a situation but takes steps to speak up or step in to keep a situation from escalating or to disrupt a problematic situation when it is safe to do so.
- 3.3.3. Individuals may be put in a position where a student, or another staff member alerts them to an incident(s) of SGBV, and it is important to know how to signpost them to appropriate, professional support, as outlined below.

4. [Reporting mechanisms and support available](#)

- 4.1. All information about available support and reporting mechanisms is available via the [SOAS Harassment and Sexual Misconduct](#) webpage and the [SOAS Report and Support portal](#).
- 4.2. The above resources link to external support as well as internal support through our Student Advice and Wellbeing Team and the staff Employee Assistance Programme.
- 4.3. We recognise that ensuring support is provided as quickly as possible is important. That support will include enabling survivors to make an informed decision about reporting. It is also possible to seek confidential advice before, during and after reporting:
 - 4.3.1.1. Staff can contact a Wellbeing Ambassador. They are Mental Health First Aid Trained and can provide a confidential sign-posting service to staff. Their role is not to tell the person what to do, but to talk through their different options and ensure they are accessing appropriate support.

- 4.3.1.2. Students can access a Sexual Violence Liaison Officer, who has been trained to provide confidential, trauma-informed support.
- 4.4. SOAS Report and Support is a platform for reporting SGBV incidents that are witnessed or experienced. They can be reported anonymously or with a name. Where incidents are reported anonymously, individuals have the option to use anonymous communication through the platform to enable SOAS to respond and provide further information and support.
 - 4.4.1. We recognise that survivors and witnesses of SGBV may not know whether they want to report formally at first. Incidents that are reported anonymously, or where the person responding does not wish to make the report formal at first, can be escalated later. Staff who might be involved in investigating SGBV incidents have had specific sexual violence training, to ensure their investigations and support are survivor-centred and trauma-informed.
 - 4.5. Where appropriate, formal reports will result in a formal investigation which will use the processes set out in the Staff Grievance Policy and Student Disciplinary Procedures, which can be accessed separately. As mentioned above, where appropriate, and with permission, cases can be referred to the police.
 - 4.6. [Serious Cases Panel for student reports](#)
 - 4.6.1. Given the complexity of some student cases, and SOAS's responsibility to support students who are accused of SGBV, as well as the survivor, an appropriately trained and supported Triage panel will review all cases of sexual violence, harassment and/or misconduct that have been reported to the University. The Triage panel will be made up of:
 - 4.6.1.1. Two senior members of SOAS community, appointed by the Equality and Diversity Committee;
 - 4.6.1.2. A member of the Students Union;
 - 4.6.2. The Triage Panel will be supported by the Student Casework team and the Student Advice and Wellbeing team, in an advisory capacity. A representative from the People Services may be present, if required for policy advice. Where possible, SOAS will ensure a good level of racial diversity, union and wellbeing representation on panels. All members of the Triage panel will receive specialist training on understanding sexual violence and an induction on processes in order to undertake this role effectively.