Media and Social Media Engagement Policy			
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Documents replaced:	MSRA-110-01 Meida Guidelines for Staff MSRA-119-01 Social Media Policy		
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.			

1. Scope and Purpose

1.1. This policy applies to all SOAS staff and any person or organisation contracted to act on SOAS's behalf in relation to the media or on social media. It is reviewed annually.

1.2. Its purposes are to promote effective and constructive engagement with journalists and social media audiences while upholding academic freedom; to protect SOAS and its staff from reputational harm arising from inappropriate or unauthorised content; and to ensure the institution speaks with a consistent, authoritative voice on matters of institutional policy.

1.3. The Communications Team has overall responsibility for this policy. All individuals covered by it are responsible for their own compliance. Questions should be directed to comms@soas.ac.uk.

1.4. All staff engaging with the media and all content published on SOAS-owned social media accounts must comply with the following policies: SOAS Core Values; SOAS Discrimination Charter; SOAS Dignity and Respect Policy; and the Guidance on Intellectual Property and Copyright. Content on SOAS-owned accounts must also adhere to the SOAS Brand and Tone of Voice Guidelines, available on Staff MySOAS.

2. Why Engagement Matters

2.1. Media coverage and an active social media presence are integral to SOAS's reputation, our ability to attract talented staff, and our influence in the regions and subjects we specialise in. Research covered in the media and shared on social media can create a pathway for impact by raising the profile of academics and their research.

2.2. The Communications Team exists to maximise these opportunities, working with staff, not act as a gatekeeper. The more they know about your work and public engagement activity, the better they can support and amplify it.

2.2.1. Our commitment to academic freedom underpins our approach to media and social media engagement by academic staff. Academics at SOAS are free to communicate their research, express their expert views, and engage in public debate without interference. This policy is intended to support that freedom, not constrain it.

3. Working with the Media

3.1. What the Communications Team does

3.1.1. The Communications Team manages all media relations for SOAS: drafting and issuing press releases; proactively pitching SOAS experts to journalists; responding to inbound enquiries; preparing staff for interviews; monitoring press coverage; and supporting op-eds, broadcast appearances and other earned media.

3.2. Speaking on behalf of the institution

3.2.1. If a journalist asks you to speak on behalf of SOAS on university policy, institutional strategy, HE sector issues, or anything outside your own research and teaching, refer them to the Communications Team without comment. Only the Communications Team and senior management are authorised to speak for the institution.

3.3. Academic staff

3.3.1. If a journalist contacts you about your research, subject expertise or teaching, you are free to respond. When you do, ensure your name, title and SOAS are referenced in the resulting coverage, and notify the Communications Team, who can maximise coverage, spot follow-up opportunities and handle calls from other outlets when the story runs. If you are working as a consultant or adviser on a broadcast programme, documentary or film, please also let the Communications team know.

3.3.2. You are never obliged to answer on the spot. Take the journalist's number, prepare your key points, and call back. Contact the Communications Team for advice at any stage (comms@soas.ac.uk).

3.3.3. If you have a research finding, new publication or development that could make a news story, bring it to the Communications team who will help identify the best outlets and timing. If an external body is planning a press release about your work, alert the Communications team as early as possible. If you receive or anticipate press coverage, forward it to comms@soas.ac.uk.

3.3.4. Media training is strongly encouraged, particularly for those new to working with journalists. SOAS offers sessions through the Communications Team; contact comms@soas.ac.uk to arrange.

3.4. Professional services staff

3.4.1. If a journalist contacts you in connection with your SOAS role, please refer the enquiry to the Communications Team without offering comment, regardless of how straightforward the question seems. Staff are of course free to speak to the media in a personal capacity, but any media engagement about their SOAS work must be agreed in advance with the relevant director and the Communications Team.

3.4.2. Some professional services roles combine administrative expertise with pedagogical, technical or research-based knowledge. Where such staff are required to speak to the media as subject experts, this must be agreed in advance with the relevant director, head of department, or the appropriate lead for any centre or institute they wish to represent.

3.5. Practical interview guidance

3.5.1. **Before:** Prepare two or three clear messages in plain language; have supporting facts or materials ready; familiarise yourself with the outlet. Contact us for a mock interview or pre-interview briefing if helpful.

3.5.2. **During:** You are the expert. Speak to evidence rather than personal opinion, especially on sensitive matters. Avoid jargon. You do not have to answer immediately, and "no comment" should be replaced with a brief explanation and a redirect. Stay calm even if challenged.

3.5.3. **After:** Notify the Communications Team; forward cuttings or links to comms@soas.ac.uk. If you are unhappy with how a story has been handled, contact the Communications team before taking any action.

4. Supplier Case Studies

4.1. Supplier case studies are a form of media engagement. When SOAS purchases products or services, suppliers will sometimes seek to publicise details of the relationship as a case study. These are typically presented as press releases or news items on the supplier's own website or external channels, and commonly include direct quotes attributed to SOAS staff. They can reference SOAS by name and make claims about the university's operations, technology environment or working practices.

4.2. No supplier case study involving SOAS should be agreed to without prior sign-off from both the Communications and Procurement teams. If a supplier approaches you directly, refer them to the Communications Team before agreeing to anything or providing any information.

5. Social Media

5.1. Types of SOAS social media accounts

5.1.1. There are three types of SOAS-associated social media presence:

- **Individual academic accounts:** personal or professional accounts run by academics to share research and expert commentary. These are quick, responsive and effective at building engaged audiences. We actively encourage their use.

- **Centrally managed SOAS accounts:** institutional accounts managed daily by the Communications and Marketing teams, with large established audiences. We welcome content ideas from across the community; please get in touch.
- **Department, centre and institute accounts:** specialist accounts that can work well when properly planned and resourced with a clear purpose and regular content schedule. We recommend using individual academic accounts and central accounts first, and only creating new accounts where there is a clear purpose and capacity is genuinely in place.

5.1.2. Further guidance is available on Staff MySOAS or from the Communications Team.

5.2. Creating and managing SOAS-owned accounts

5.2.1. Any new SOAS-branded account requires prior approval from the Communications Team. To request approval, email comms@soas.ac.uk demonstrating that you have: a clear business case (purpose, audiences, engagement goals, content and community management capacity); a nominated primary administrator who will bear overall responsibility; a brand-compliant handle, profile image and bio that includes 'SOAS'; and confirmation that this policy has been read and understood.

5.2.2. All accounts must be created with a SOAS (@soas.ac.uk) email address and a secure password shared with the Communications Team. If the primary administrator leaves SOAS, account ownership must be transferred and the Communications Team notified.

5.2.3. Primary administrators are personally responsible for all posts, comments and direct messages. Content must be directly related to the account's purpose. Accounts with consistently low activity will be subject to unpublishing or deactivation.

5.2.4. SOAS reserves the right to require removal of any post or account; refuse permission for new accounts; investigate concerns around impartiality, confidentiality or misconduct; and suspend posting across all channels during a crisis or emergency.

5.3. Personal social media accounts

5.3.1. SOAS does not use personal accounts to express institutional views. Staff are not responsible to SOAS for their personal accounts, but are advised to exercise good judgement: treat others with respect and empathy; be aware that posts may remain publicly visible for many years; and avoid stating or implying that you are communicating in an official SOAS capacity.

5.3.2. Do not share confidential information about SOAS, staff or partners, and do not make negative public comments about SOAS or colleagues. Journalists monitor social media and may quote posts without prior contact, so bear this in mind when posting about your work or matters of public controversy.

5.3.3. In line with the IT Acceptable Use Policy, SOAS email addresses should not be used to set up or administer personal social media accounts.

5.3.4. SOAS respects freedom of expression, including the right of staff to hold and express personal views in a private capacity. Where a complaint has been received about a social media post made by a staff member, the University may consider taking further investigations to determine if the post:

- breaches organisational policies
- constitutes harassment, discrimination, bullying, or hate speech
- discloses confidential or sensitive information
- reasonably appears to represent the organisation's views when it does not
- damages or risks damaging the organisation's reputation
- involves interactions with students or colleagues that undermine professional boundaries
- raises safeguarding concerns

5.4. Negative behaviour online

5.4.1. If a SOAS account you manage receives a high volume of negative engagement, offensive comments or direct messages can be hidden or deleted. SOAS reserves the right to do this on behalf of SOAS-owned accounts. Anyone experiencing online hate or harassment is encouraged to contact the Communications Team for support.

6. Quick Reference

Situation	Action
Journalist contacts academic about their research or expertise	Respond directly, then notify the Communications Team
Journalist asks about SOAS policy or institutional position (all staff)	Refer to Communications Team without comment
Journalist contacts professional services staff about their SOAS role	Refer to Communications Team; agree with directorate director and comms before speaking about SOAS work
Professional services staff asked to speak as subject experts	Agree in advance with directorate director, head of department, or relevant centre/institute lead
Supplier requests a case study featuring SOAS (all staff)	Do not agree without prior sign-off from Communications Team and Procurement
You have a research story or publication to promote	Contact the Communications Team to plan coverage
External body issuing a press release about your work	Alert the Communications Team as early as possible
You receive or anticipate media coverage	Forward to comms@soas.ac.uk
You want to create a new SOAS-branded social media account	Email comms@soas.ac.uk with a business case before creating the account

Official account receives offensive comments or harassment	Hide or delete content; contact the Communications Team for support
You are unsure how to handle any media or social media situation	Contact the Communications Team for advice before acting