

BOARD OF TRUSTEES MINUTES

23rd OCTOBER 2025, 15.00-18:00

SOAS SENATE CHAMBERS, S219 AND MICROSOFT TEAMS

Present

Michael Hastings	Chair
Nizam Uddin	Vice Chair (joined for the second half the meeting)
Jo Beall	Vice Chair
Richard Millward	Honorary Treasurer
Adam Habib	Vice-Chancellor
Khadir Meer	DVC Finance and Operations
Joanna Newman	Provost and DVC Education
Laura Hammond	DVC Research and Knowledge Exchange
Jenny Greenshields	External Trustee
Kersti Börjars	External Trustee
Cedric Ntumba	External Trustee
Yaa Ofori-Ansah	External Trustee
Joanna Hotung	External Trustee
Richard Brown	External Trustee
Alan Duncan	External Trustee
Dan Roberts	Professional Services representative
Graeme Earl	Head of College (CoHum)
Lindiwe Dovey	Senate representative
Sam Hardy	SU representative
Charlie Oubridge	RSA Student Union representative

In Attendance

Shona Aitken	Chief of Staff
Justin Smith	Chief Finance Officer
Donna Fong	Director of Governance
Angelique Tjen	Head of Governance (minutes)
Andrew Goodman	Director of Estates (item 9)
Esra Karutafek	SHEQ Manager (item 9)
Tawnya Cheathem	Director MSRC (item 11)
Claire Herbert	Head of EDI and Wellbeing (item1)

Apologies

Sally Townsend	External Trustee
David Willey	External Trustee
Steven Pfeiffer	External Trustee
Tom Yoritaka	External Trustee
Shirin Rai	Senate Representative

2. Opening Administration

B 25/26 1 2 Welcome and apologies for absence

The Chair welcomed everyone to the first meeting of the new academic year and welcomed the new trustees: Joanna Hotung, Richard Brown, Sir Alan Duncan, Shirin Rai, Dan Roberts, Graeme Earl, Charlie Oubridge, Sam Hardy. The Chair noted those joining online and apologies from: Sally Townsend, David Willey, Steven Pfeiffer, Tom Yoritaka, and Shirin Rai.

The Chair asked the new External trustees for their first impressions of the university. They all agreed that it was impressive and that they were very positive. The campus also had a warm atmosphere.

B 25/26 1 3 Declaration of interests

Trustees confirmed that there were no interests to declare.

B 25/26 1 4 Review of Standing Orders

Trustees noted the Standing orders.

B 25/26 1 5 Confirmation of the agenda

Trustees confirmed the agenda.

B 25/26 1 6 Minutes of the meeting held on 17th July 2025

Trustee approved the minutes of the meeting held on 17th July 2025.

B 25/26 1 7 Action log

Trustees noted the Action log.

B 25/26 1 8 Annual Schedule of Business

Trustees noted the Annual Schedule of Business.

1. Presentation

B 25/26 1 1 Developing the EDI (Equality Diversity and Inclusion) Strategy

The Head of ED&I presented the proposed approach for the development of the new EDI Strategy, which will comply with the Equality Act and align with the new SOAS strategy. The presentation provided reflections and achievements to date and also data on EDI indicators in SOAS. Compared to other Higher Education institutions, SOAS has been performing well with EDI. To continue this the EDI ethos is “One SOAS: diverse by nature, inclusive by design” as this encapsulates the way that SOAS is. The Trustees showed strong support for this tagline .

Trustees enquired about the prevalence of stress and suicides in SOAS. It was highlighted that though suicides are not rare in the HE sector, it is rare at SOAS. However there still needs to be more support to students and staff related to stress and promoting wellbeing.

The Head of EDI also commented that the areas for enrichment are non-exhaustive although the university could only focus on a few at any period of time.

The Board of Trustees were positive about the EDI Strategy and the approach being taken and thanked the EDI team. The Board of Trustees Student representative volunteered additional support and involvement for the developing EDI Strategy.

The Chairman requested that in future if presentations could have less data on slides and that abbreviations should be avoided or explained.

Action: The Board of Trustees requested a list of SOAS abbreviations and explanations.

Action: The Head of EDI & Wellbeing will be providing the Equality Impact Assessment to the Board of Trustees later in the year. Post meeting note: this has been included in the Annual Schedule of Business for the 14th May 2025 Board of Trustees meeting.

3. Part A Items for Discussion

B 25/26 1 9 Annual Health & Safety update

The Director of Estates provided the update of Health & Safety at SOAS and highlighted the roles & responsibilities under the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974 and how this impacted SOAS. The Act mandates employers, employees, and others to take reasonable steps to prevent workplace injuries and illnesses. The SOAS commitments are:

1. Management of health and safety is essential to its overall business plan
2. Committed to the health, safety and well-being of our staff, students, contractors and visitors
2. Responsibilities have been delegated through each member of the senior management chain
3. Effectiveness of policies will be monitored through a framework of internal and external auditing exercises.
4. People are the most important asset to this institution; therefore, we are committed to ensuring their health, safety and welfare at all times.
5. From an economic perspective, SOAS believes prevention is better and more cost-effective than cure.

The Board of Trustees noted the annual health & safety update.

The Trustees asked what was the most worrying risk for SOAS. The Director of Estates explained that there aren't any of concern as there are protocols and processes for dealing with the various health and safety risks identified.

B 25/26 1 10 Vice Chancellor's report and Final Institutional scorecard targets 24-25 and Institutional scorecard 25-26

The Vice Chancellor presented the Vice Chancellor's report with the Institutional scorecard 24-25 and the Institutional scorecard 25-26.

The Board of Trustees noted the results of the Institutional scorecard 24-25.

The Board of Trustees approved the new Institutional scorecard 25-26. It was noted that this aligns with the Strategic Plan 2026-30 which will be rolled out in January 2026. Trustees expressed that it was positive to have non-traditional research included in the institutional scorecards.

The Vice Chancellor's report was noted. From the report, the following areas arose for discussion:

- It was a surprise that SOAS's "added value" score was not higher in the various league table rankings since SOAS's impact and contribution does appear to be quite high. The Provost and DVC Education would explore this metric in more detail.
- 2024/25 was another good year for fundraising and various areas of fundraising are being explored
- The Korea Foundation matched fund opportunity was matched by an additional £2 million which was ringfenced for Korean Studies. This £4 million endowed funding will solidify the Korea Studies offering at SOAS.
- Following approval by the Resources and Planning Committee (RPC), the Executive Team are progressing the potential acquisition of Wood Green Hall (WGH) as a strategic investment to support its long-term student accommodation strategy. The Investment

Committee has deliberated on the options in which to purchase the property, and a proposal to pursue the option of debt funding will be recommended to the RPC on 12/11/2025 prior to approval by the Board on 21/11/2025

- The SU representative also asked what SOAS' stance on China is especially as SOAS are developing partnerships with China and does SOAS' relationship with China, risk the safety of SOAS students. The Vice Chancellor confirmed that the partnerships are commercial and not politically influenced which is why SOAS also has partnerships with Taiwan. All relationships with China are pragmatic. As regards students, there was a recent arrest of a SOAS student in China, SOAS's approach has been similar to other UK and European HE institutions with the Vice Chancellor writing to the Chinese Ambassador and maintaining that relationship to try and resolve the situation.

B 25/26 1 11 Update on 2025/26 Enrolment and Income

The Chief Finance Officer and the Director MSRC presented the update on 2025/26 Enrolment and income. The summary is as follows:

- In the 25/26 Draft Budget SOAS set some stretching targets for itself.
- Continuing student enrolment has been broadly as expected.
- New student enrolment is well below what is expected.
- It seems there has been a further drop in overseas students, and Russell Group universities have also been recruiting aggressively.
- Despite the income shortfall, SOAS can balance back with contingencies and by capitalising on various opportunities and measures to close the gap.
- The outlook for student numbers and fee income for 26/27 and beyond is uncertain and SOAS therefore needs to grow income, and/or reduce costs, to remain financially sustainable.

The Trustees noted the update.

It was also discussed that the balance for future provision of courses would be targeted to better increase income, for example, with languages, and making the provision of these courses more commercially attractive.

B 25/26 1 12 NSS (National Student Survey) Plan 2025/26

The Provost and DVC Education presented the National Student Survey (NSS) 2025 results and next steps. SOAS is in the fourth quartile overall. However SOAS's scores improved in all seven themes of the survey, and SOAS closed the gap to the sector average in five of these areas. These improvements at university and at department level are a measure of the huge effort across SOAS to improve student outcomes and experience. To address the areas requiring improvement SOAS will continue with the NSS Turnaround Plan that started in 2024/25 with a more targeted approach, tightening ownership and monitoring of NSS-related actions, following recommendations emerging from the UNIAC audit on student feedback. In 2025/26 the institutional NSS Turnaround plan will be integrated into departmental continuous review processes and monitored through SMT and Provost's Senior Leadership Team.

Board of Trustees noted the NSS results and the NSS action plan and the focused approach to addressing 'assessment and feedback' and 'academic support' in particular.

Departments have been provided with detailed results which they will consider as part of their ongoing continuous review processes. They will develop action plans to deliver improvements for future surveys, which will be monitored by TELSEC (Teaching Learning and Student Experience committee). Provost's SLT and SMT (Senior Management Team) will maintain oversight of the NSS Turnaround plans as we integrate the NSS institutional action plan into department-specific Continuous Review processes. For Law, Politics and Economics, the Dean of CoSS has established a Task and Finish Group to address the 'assessment and feedback' measures, specifically.

It was also noted that the NSS score is before the implementation of semesters so the scores should improve further this year.

It was commented that sometimes students do not participate in the NSS, not because they want to boycott it but simply because they dislike it. The Vice Chancellor expressed that the politics of SOAS does impact the score.

4. Part B Items for Noting and Approval

B 25/26 1 13 SOAS Charter on Racism

During May 2025, the existing SOAS Charter on Racism, Antisemitism and All Forms of Cultural, Ethnic and Religious Chauvinism was re-ratified by the Executive Board, Senate and Board of Trustees. Members of these committees requested that a working group was established to review and refine the SOAS statement to ensure it clearly reflects the institutional position on racism.

The working group has created an updated Charter which includes the following changes:

- Replaces use of the work 'chauvinism' with 'discrimination' in title and body
- Adds Purpose section to clarify the Charter's role in relation to other EDI policies
- The purpose section includes the Protected Characteristics as defined by the Equality Act 2010
- Specifically names Islamophobia in the title and body of the Charter
- Adds clarification that opposition to discrimination is not limited to the forms named in the document
- Transphobia and queerphobia were added to the wider list of forms of discrimination we are united against (see the Values section)
- Adds a link to practical support for community members experiencing discrimination (Report and Support, and eventually a link to new webpage being prepared by governance).

It was noted that the title has been shortened from previously when it was known as the Charter on Racism, Antisemitism and All Forms of Cultural, Ethnic and Religious Chauvinism. This should not be confused with the Royal Charter.

Trustees approved the update to the SOAS Charter.

5. Part C Updates for Subcommittees

B 25/26 1 14 Senate

The Senate minutes of 2nd July 2025 have been noted by the Board of Trustees.

B 25/26 1 15 Resources and Planning

The RPC minutes of 18th June 2025 are noted.

The Board of Trustees noted the change in membership of the Investment Committee with five independent specialist advisors which has raised the expertise of the committee.

B 25/26 1 16 Audit and Risk

The minutes of 1st July 2025 are noted as are the ARC Annual Report 2024/25 and the ARC internal Audit Report and Opinion.

B 25/26 1 17 Governance and Nominations Committee

The Board of Trustees were asked to note that the Report from the Review on Dundee University with lessons learnt is being published.

Date of Next Meeting

The Chairman concluded the meeting by thanking everyone and confirmed the date of the next meeting which is the Board of Trustees retreat on 20th -21st November 2025 at Hotel du Vin in Wimbledon.