

BOARD OF TRUSTEES MINUTES

THURSDAY 6th FEBRUARY 2024, 15.00-18.00

SOAS SENATE CHAMBERS, S219 AND MICROSOFT TEAMS

Present

Michael Hastings	Chair
Jo Beall	Vice Chair
Nizam Uddin	Vice Chair
Richard Millward	Honorary Treasurer
Adam Habib	Vice-Chancellor
Cedric Ntumba	Member
Emma Crewe	Member
Jenny Greenshields	Member
Joanna Newman	Provost and DVC Education
Kersti Börjars	Member
Elisa Van Waeyenberge	Head of College (CoDEF)
Laura Hammond	DVC Research and Knowledge Exchange
Sally Townsend	Member
Tom Yoritaka	Member
Yaa Ofori-Ansah	Member
Tawnya Cheatheam	Director Marketing, Student Recruitment and Communications
Lindiwe Dovey	Senate representative
David Willey	Member
Steven Pfeiffer	Member
Andrew Atherton	Member
Ekabali Ghosh	Member
Safia Shaikh	Member

In Attendance

Khadir Meer	DVC Finance and Operations
Justin Smith	Director of Finance and Procurement
Kanina Foss	Chief of Staff
Donna Fong	Director of Governance
Angelique Tjen	Governance Manager
John Macey	Director of People

Apologies

Rehana Ameer	Member
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1. Opening Administration

B 24/25 3 1 Welcome and apologies for absence

The Chair welcomed everyone who joined the meeting in person and online and noted apologies from Rehana Ameer. He then welcomed Lindiwe Dovey as a new member of the Board of Trustees, representing the Seante.

The Chair also reflected on the financial position which most other universities are facing, and gave thanks to the Executive and the Director of Finance and Procurement and his team for their work to maintain a stable financial position for SOAS.

B 24/25 3 2 Confirmation of the agenda

The meeting's agenda has been approved.

B 24/25 3 3 Minutes

The Minutes from the 10th October 2024 and 22nd November 2024 has been approved by the Board of Trustees subject to the following requested amendments:

- Correcting the spelling of Steven Pfeiffer's name from the 10th October 2024 minutes and confirmation of his attendance market the meeting.

B 24/25 3 4 Action Log

It was agreed that there were no actions overdue. A small amendment was requested to remove the reference to "donating in kind" for the action related to trustees donating to SOAS. The amended action now reads "To develop a process to support Trustees to donate to the university".

B 24/25 3 5 Annual Schedule of Business

The Board of Trustees noted the Annual Schedule of Business and requested that in deciding the date for the Board of Trustees Retreat, Thanksgiving should be taken into account so that the Retreat date does not coincide.

2. Part A Items for noting or approval

B 24/25 3 6 Financial Regulations

The Director of Finance presented the Financial Regulations which set out the key responsibilities within the University and the financial regulations to be followed by the Board of Trustees and all University Committee members, University staff and non-staff engaged in

SOAS activity. These Financial Regulations cover all aspects of the University's financial operation including budget setting, financial year-end, banking, treasury management, incoming/outgoing funds, insurance and fraud prevention.

The Board approved the revised Financial Regulations with the request that section 6.1 which relates to investment decisions, is clarified to ensure the role of the Resources and Planning Committee is to make investment recommendations to the Board of Trustees for decision, as it is not the decision of the Resources and Planning Committee.

B 24/25 3 7 Health & Safety Policy

The DVC Finance and Operations presented the Health & Safety policy which was last updated in 2022 and documents how health and safety is managed at SOAS. In line with the biennial review date of 2024, the document has been reviewed and updated. The changes that have been made are minimal and include changes within the organisation, such as role titles.

The Board approved the revised Health & Safety Policy.

The Board requested that 2.1 “The overall and final responsibility for Health and Safety is that of the Director” should be changed to “The overall and final responsibility for Health and Safety is that of the Vice-Chancellor”.

B 24/25 3 8 Health & Safety Annual Report

The DVC Finance and Operations presented the Health & Safety Annual Report which provides an overview of our performance, achievements, and challenges in ensuring the health, safety, and well-being of our students, staff, contractors, and stakeholders over the past year. It reflects our unwavering commitment to maintaining a safe and compliant work environment and highlights our progress in embedding health and safety as a core organisational value. As well as embedding a safety culture, which is inclusive and speaks to all key stakeholders.

The Board noted this report.

B 24/25 3 9 Research Integrity Annual Statement (2023/24)

The DVC Research & Knowledge Exchange presented the Research Integrity Annual Statement which is an annual statement covering activities undertaken to support research integrity and foster good research practice, as well as policies, processes and actions to address any concerns about research conducted. It is a requirement to produce this annual statement in order to receive funding from Research England.

The Board discussed paragraph 5 and the use of artificial intelligence and noted that the university should ensure that guidance is relevant and appropriate.

The Board noted and approved the Research Integrity Annual Statement.

B 24/25 3 10 Athena Swan Submission

The DVC Research & Knowledge Exchange presented the paper on the Athena Swan Charter application. The Athena Swan Charter is a framework which is used across the globe to support and transform gender equality within higher education (HE) and research. The Athena Swan application was approved by Executive Board on 13th January, the Resources and Planning Committee on 15th January and was submitted to Advance HE on 30th January. SOAS currently holds a Bronze Athena Swan award which we are looking to renew.

The following points were raised and discussed by the Board:

- To set out ambitions to move from a bronze to silver award which includes demonstrating our annual Action Plan. SOAS would like to focus on the bronze award to demonstrate stability after Covid and then identify best practice from universities with silver awards so that we can work on achieving the silver award and beyond.
- Next steps to include supporting local-level Athena Swan awards, which would help to embed good EDI practice within Colleges and Directorates.
- It appears that female academics take more pastoral care roles as well as core teaching roles in SOAS. As part of the next steps, the university will review this and look at ways to redress the balance if this is the case.

The Board has approved the Athena Swan submission.

3. Part B Items for Discussion/ Approval

B 24/25 3 11 Vice Chancellor's Annual report

The Vice Chancellor presented his report and highlighted:

- **Institutional scorecard**
SOAS has met or exceeded all financial sustainability targets; the research quality target has been exceeded and research grant expenditure is also on track to be higher than expected, and targets for improving HR processes have been exceeded. We are on track to meet targets in all other areas, except for student enrolment where we underrecruited in UG and PGT, although it was a very challenging climate across the sector. ODL enrolments are continuing and a final update will be provided in June/July.
- **Teaching and Learning**
Student satisfaction and experience is noted to be improving with a 5% increase in engagement and a 9% increase in overall satisfaction to date in the National Student Survey. Additionally, preparations to introduce semesterisation from September 2025, are well underway. This will be challenging and communications and support will need to be provided to students.
- **Financial sustainability**

The university is performing well compared to other HE institutions as 72% of the sector are in deficit (with SOAS in the 28% which are not).

- **Recruitment and Marketing**

Postgraduate levels are improving but global policy environments across the big-four study destinations continue to be uncertain.

- **Leadership and Portfolio changes**

Sam Henney has been appointed as the interim Chief Librarian. Lesley O’Keeffe has been appointed interim Academic Registrar with responsibility for the Registry and College Student and Academic Support teams. Brian Jordan, the Deputy Director of Governance has taken responsibility for Student Complaints Student Advice and Wellbeing and the Careers Service.

- **Equitable Partnerships**

SOAS continues to explore its equitable partnerships model, while giving focus to other types of developmental and commercial partnerships, as and when opportunities arise. The focus of our equitable partnerships agenda is to develop a financially viable business model which enables us to target new markets. This work is on track with all agreements to date, finalised. There will be review of global partnerships one year after an equitable partnership has been commissioned.

- **SOAS five-year Strategy**

Significant progress is being achieved to date in the delivery of the 2021-25 Strategy , which has aided the the development of the 2026-30 Strategy. A number of key themes are being explored and consulted upon including growth of the postgraduate student numbers as well discussions about where to re-prioritise spend to facilitate a greater number of scholarships to be offered to attract postgraduate students. A review of the College Structure to support the future Strategy is being undertaken to help enable these aims.

B 24/25 3 12 Update on the Staff survey

The Director of People presented the high level results for the staff survey from November and December 2024. The data at a high level compares modestly favourably with 2022 survey data, indicating some encouraging signs of improvement. It also indicates some clear areas for further focus. The engagement score of 65% is still considered relatively low although it is an improvement compared to the survey in 2022. Areas of strength include; building trust and wellbeing and areas with lower scores include; rewards & recognition and challenging the way things are done. Academics seem to be less content compared to professional services.

We are now entering a phase of dialogue and exploration across the community, at a university level, with our union partners and in local colleges, departments and directorates. This will take place during the remainder of this term and we aim to craft local and university-wide action plans towards the beginning of term 3. This process is vital to ensure we fully understand what the data is telling us and to ensure the community engages with and endorses our action plans, and supports us in their delivery.

We will therefore explore the data in more depth and granularity and once we have greater insight and some developed action plans, we will present these to the Board of Trustees

through the Resources and Planning Committee, and subsequently keep the Board updated on progress towards delivery.

The Board noted the staff survey results and next steps.

B 24/25 3 13 Strategic Risk Register

The Director of Governance presented the update on the Strategic Risk Register. It was noted that risk scores across the strategic risks had not been impacted despite mitigating actions in place. It was noted the University is in the process of aligning local risk registers with the Strategic Risk Register

The Board noted the Strategic Risk Register and discussed whether the following should be captured as high risk areas:

- Cyber attacks so that mitigations and contingencies can be put in place.
- The impact of Artificial Intelligence.
- Institutional culture arising from the Staff survey.

It was agreed that a full review of the Strategic Risk register would be undertaken by the Executive to ensure the risks are reflective of the University's current position.

4. Part C Update from Sub-committees

B 24/25 3 14 Senate

The Board noted the minutes and the Senate meeting discussion points together with the award of Emeritus status to Professor Angela Impey, Professor Louise Tythacott, and Professor Gilbert Achcar.

The Board discussed the low response rate (10 of 44 responses) for the annual Senate Committee Effectiveness survey. However it was noted that the Senate have specifically discussed the outcomes of the survey, and agreed an ongoing dialogue of how to improve effectiveness of the committee.

B 24/25 3 15 Resource and Planning Committee (RPC)

The Board noted the minutes. There were no other points raised.

B 24/25 3 16 Audit and Risk Committee (ARC)

The Board noted the minutes and that the Strategic Risk Register had been discussed.

B 24/25 3 17 Remuneration Committee (RemCom)

The Chair of the Remuneration Committee provided a verbal update on the meeting which was held less than a week prior to the Board of Trustees meeting. The Chair explained that the HE benchmarking study was discussed and that this would help simplify decisions for proposed Executive pay which would be presented at the Remuneration Committee meeting in July.

AOB

The Board discussed preparation for the next Board of Trustees meeting in March as this is the annual joint meeting with Senate. The meeting would be principally on the Strategic Plan 2026-30. It was noted that small groups would facilitate discussions as the meeting would have a lot of attendees.

It was also agreed that there will be review of global partnerships one year after an equitable partnership has been commissioned.

5. Date of Next Meeting

The Chairman concluded the meeting by thanking everyone and confirmed the date of the next meeting which is the Joint Board of Trustees and Senate meeting on 20th March 2025.