

Education Strategy

2021-26

January 2022





SOAS Education Strategy 2021-2026

Context

The education that SOAS provides is strongly rooted in its mission to be a centre for excellence in research and teaching through the lens of Asia, Africa and the Middle East. The practices that we employ to provide this education draw on our values of promoting excellence and privilege justice, inclusivity and equality and celebrate diversity. Steeped in the commitment to these values the School has pledged to decolonising knowledge, its curriculum, learning and teaching and the student experience; this undertaking, set out in the decolonising SOAS vision, permeates all aspects of this Strategy and the actions and methods taken to achieve its goals. We will demonstrate in concrete ways through our approaches to a SOAS education that we value diversity of view and experience and encourage critical enquiry; that we are committed to tolerance, respect and collegiality and that we stand firm against all forms of discrimination. We welcome students from all backgrounds and geographies and believe that our education enables our graduates to live out SOAS values in the workplace.

The purpose of this Education Strategy is to set out what SOAS aims to achieve in the next 5 years in relation to our curriculum; learning, teaching and assessment; the student experience; student engagement and outcomes for our students. Our Education Strategy will enable us to address and support the four pillars of the SOAS Strategy – Student Responsiveness; Research-Intensity; International Partnerships; and Institutional Community.

In driving forward our strategy we will: Be global and pluralistic in our outlook, leading the sector in building cultural bridges and enabling our graduates to solve complex problems; be ambitious, creative and forward looking, bringing the best research into our curriculum and educational practice and work collaboratively with one another and our students, co-creating a diverse and inclusive community that extends beyond the bounds of SOAS itself.

Goals

Our strategic goals are to provide:

- A challenging, interdisciplinary, globally engaged curriculum and a portfolio of programmes developed through equitable global partnerships which enable students and staff to address global challenges
- Clearly structured programmes of study underpinned by expertise in the societies, cultures, economies, laws and languages of Africa, Asia and the Middle East and their diasporas
- Sector leadership in a decolonising and inclusive approach to education, underpinned by research informed teaching, supervision and assessment for learning
- A transformative student experience that seeks to redress structural inequalities, creates a sense of belonging, and supports excellent educational and personal development outcomes for all individuals in our diverse and international student community
- Active engagement with our students at all levels of the organisation as co-creators of curricular and co-curricular experiences
- Preparation for work and further study that ensures SOAS graduates from all backgrounds are positioned to have impact on the world in the roles of the future
- Responsive, pro-active, effective and accessible academic and well-being support that enables all our students to succeed

SOAS' Education Strategy links to, and complements, our other underpinning strategies. Our integrated approach to planning and implementation in tackling racialised attainment gaps, improving assessment and feedback and academic support is set out in the SOAS Access and Participation Plan. The outcomes of the Research and Knowledge Exchange Strategy are key to SOAS' teaching which is led and informed by research and our students are engaged in research at all levels of study. Our Employability Strategy sets out how all members of SOAS contribute to effective and fulfilling outcomes for graduates. Our Equality Diversity and Inclusivity Strategy commits us to identifying and meeting diverse student needs and to offering accessible and inclusive practice in learning, teaching and research. An attractive, sustainable and well delivered curriculum and excellent student support is fundamental to our Financial Strategy and all aspects of a SOAS education are underpinned by the Estates Strategy.

Students at SOAS

SOAS has almost 5,400 students on campus and over 1,500 distance learning students. Of the on-campus students, over 3,000 are undergraduate students (82.9% Home/EU, 17.01% Overseas) including 350 or so entering the Foundation Year; around 1,750 are taking post-graduate taught programmes (68.05% Home/EU, 31.95% Overseas) and we have more than 560 doctoral researchers (52.29% Home/EU, 47.71% Overseas). The gender composition of the School student community is 65.14% female, 34.71% male and approximately 0.15% other. At undergraduate level, 16.2% of the student cohort were older than 21 on entry and 72.2% were not living in halls. Our on-campus student community is consistently international and ethnically diverse, for example in 2020-2021 students described themselves as: 35.3% White, 23.4% Asian, 9.6% Black, 9.5% Mixed Race, 6.6% Chinese, 6.3% Arab, 5.9% Other and would not say, 1.9% Middle Eastern and 1.5% South East Asian¹.

The goals and priorities set out in this strategy apply to the whole student community at all levels of study (Foundation, Undergraduate, Postgraduate Taught and Postgraduate Research), living in the UK and overseas, on and off campus. At SOAS we want our graduates to be able to challenge perspectives and interpret the world; to bring expertise in multi- and interdisciplinary approaches to facilitate change; to be able to connect communities and cultures and to be able to research and furnish cogent arguments and to provide solutions to world problems that draw on the importance of understanding different contexts and cultures.

Priorities

SOAS has committed to continuing to address the need for decolonisation and the eradication of racialised inequalities. Our priorities set out the areas which we have agreed to focus on in the next 5 years and in which we will embed inclusivity throughout our actions, methods, policies, processes and practices. We will continually challenge ourselves, working in partnership across the institution, to become sector leading.

The priorities for this 5-year strategy are to deliver:

1. A suite of programmes developed in partnership with institutions in the Global South that address global challenges and enable virtual and physical staff and student mobility
2. A clearly structured interdisciplinary curriculum enriched by programmes and modules drawing on SOAS' expertise in Africa, Asia and the Middle East, with effective and accessible academic guidance and personalised support

¹ Based on data from academic year 2020/21

3. Sector leading decolonising and inclusive research-informed teaching and assessment, with timely and useful formative and summative feedback
4. Education that promotes anti-racism and creates a sense of belonging
5. Outstanding blended, online & distance learning enabling students to learn flexibly and to engage with one another locally and globally
6. Significant improvements in the recruitment, retention and progression of students across all characteristics and the elimination of the racialised awards (attainment) gap
7. Improved career outcomes for all students which build on their aspirations, knowledge and wider skills
8. Clear and regular opportunities to listen and respond to the diversity of student voice
9. A programme of development for all staff that supports innovative and creative teaching, supervision and student support grounded in a strong evidence base

Enablers

A number of structures, processes and activities will support the delivery of the Education Strategy:

- a. Rewarding academic and professional services staff for innovation in teaching,
- b. assessment and delivering the wider student experience
- c. Support for all staff to innovate and develop knowledge and skills and to share good practice internally and externally including an equitable and transparent Workload Allocation Model (WAM)
- d. Student engagement in co-creating learning, teaching and assessment
- e. International partnerships to enable the development of interdisciplinary global programmes and to support student mobility
- f. Continuous improvement in our systems, digital technology, processes and infrastructure to ensure these are effective and efficient and allow us to release staff capacity for other activities
- g. An academic calendar that supports flexible delivery of teaching and assessment
- h. Provision and use of data and analytics to underpin decision making
- i. A world class national research library, the Brunei Gallery, SOAS' learning spaces and those we have access to as part of the University of London because of our Central London location
- j. Effective governance and decision-making structures to support the oversight and development of education at SOAS

July 2021

Part 2 – Internal document Delivering the Education Strategy

1. A suite of programmes developed in partnership with institutions in the Global South that address global challenges and enable virtual and physical staff and student mobility

To provide this we will:

- develop new interdisciplinary programmes in partnership with HE partners in Africa, Asia and the Middle East
- develop further opportunities for staff and students to work collaboratively with counterparts in partner institutions both physically and virtually

2. A clearly structured interdisciplinary curriculum enriched by programmes and modules drawing on SOAS' expertise in Africa, Asia and the Middle East, with effective and accessible academic guidance and personalised support

To provide this we will:

- develop a SOAS curriculum strategy to guide and underpin programme development
- build on the recent curriculum review, providing a robust but agile approach to new programme development and the refresh of current programmes
- use our quality assurance framework to ensure our standards are robust and that we respond to student feedback to improve our offer
- support departments to ensure undergraduate and postgraduate programmes conform to the guided curriculum guidelines
- revise programme information on our website to ensure it is clear and accessible
- ensure that our portfolio reflects the mission of the School to deepen knowledge and expertise about Africa, Asia and the Middle East and their diaspora through programmes and modules that focus on the languages, cultures economies and societies of these regions
- regularly review the module offering and descriptions at programme level to ensure that it meets the needs of students and is sustainable
- ensure a framework is in place to address student support issues at the point of need
- further develop our wellbeing and mental health support provision ensuring we remove barriers to accessibility for all students but particularly those from under-represented groups

3. Sector leading decolonising and inclusive research-informed teaching and assessment, with timely and useful formative and summative feedback

To provide this we will:

- continue to review curriculum, learning and teaching approaches and assessment in partnership with our students to ensure they are research-informed, inclusive and rooted in a decolonising approach
- ensure that learning, teaching and assessment approaches are underpinned by pedagogical scholarship and good practice
- improve assessment literacy and ensure all assessment briefs, submission and return dates are clearly communicated and adhered to and that feedback is effective
- review assessment volume and timing to ensure formative and summative feedback can be included in all modules
- further develop the SOAS research-informed teaching strategy



4. Education that promotes anti-racism and creates a sense of belonging

To provide this we will:

- develop and deliver an interdisciplinary module (or equivalent) on anti-racism for all students
- integrate and deliver on EDI Strategic Plan commitments on culture, learning & teaching, student experience & student outcomes
- embed in our Education the principles set out in the SOAS Charter Against Discrimination, which commits us to being an institution that: values diversity, critical enquiry & disagreement; is committed to tolerance, respect & collegiality; stands firm against all forms of discrimination
- create supported spaces for community dialogues

5. Outstanding blended, online & distance learning enabling students to learn flexibly and to engage with one another locally and globally

To provide this we will:

- share good and innovative learning, teaching and assessment practice across the School and with the Bloomsbury group
- build on the delivery of remote teaching under COVID-19 to provide a permanent high quality blended learning component in every programme
- refresh the SOAS online & distance learning (ODL) strategy, including the suite of MOOCs, which builds on best practice within and outside the organisation and extends our global reach
- develop mechanisms by which students can engage with peers and organisations globally as part of their programme either remotely or in person, including increased student mobility

6. Significant improvements in the recruitment, retention and progression of students across all characteristics and the elimination of the racialised awards (attainment) gap

To achieve this we will:

- promote strategies to address bias
- ensure that retention & undergraduate and postgraduate attainment/ awards gap data are regularly monitored at programme, Department and School level and linked to improvement planning
- regularly review assessment practices including timing and volume of assessment
- engage students in dialogue about assessment and feedback and develop a co-creator approach to assessment
- put in place more sophisticated early warning systems for students at risk of dropping out
- establish tailored support for Black students and extend peer mentoring schemes across the School focussing initially on mentoring for Black students
- provide academic and well-being support that meets the needs of the diverse SOAS student community
- recognise and support the increased levels of mental health difficulties that students face and the exacerbating effect of the COVID-19 pandemic

7. Improved career outcomes for all students (Foundation, UG, PGT and PGR) which build on their aspirations, knowledge and wider skills

To achieve this we will:

- ensure we scrutinise and respond to graduate outcomes data at programme, Department and School level
- develop a set of SOAS graduate attributes
- embed career thinking and employability focused activities and assessment in all programmes
- ensure that all programmes of study have an element of work-related learning in them, whether this is as part of the study and assessment methods used or work placements
- provide opportunities for all students to develop digital literacy
- provide opportunities for all students to learn and develop skills which will be useful in the workplace once they have left SOAS
- put in place a skill recording mechanism to enable all students to record and articulate their skills effectively to potential employers
- further develop alumni networks to include mentoring of current students
- further develop the provision of careers fairs and student conferences across the School

8. Clear and regular opportunities to listen and respond to the diversity of student voice

To enable this we will:

- work in partnership with the SOAS Student's Union to train and support our student representatives
- engage students at all levels of study (Foundation, UG, PGT, PGR) as co-researchers and changemakers at Department and School level
- conduct a well-planned array of student surveys and focus groups in order to understand student needs whilst avoiding survey fatigue
- ensure that communication between staff and students is effective and timely and that our systems and processes support the student journey effectively
- ensure that students are represented across the governance and committee structure
- develop an innovative programme of events to support transition to University

9. A programme of development for all staff that supports innovative and creative teaching, supervision and student support grounded in a strong evidence base

To deliver this we will:

- support and encourage staff to gain HEA fellowship and engage in CPD
- improve peer observation and peer mentoring to support and enhance teaching delivery and practice
- provide an induction programme that prepares academic and professional services staff to deliver excellent teaching, assessment and student support
- provide excellent support and development for academic advisers
- continue to promote and support the Director's teaching prize for innovation and creativity in teaching and learning for on and off campus programmes
- provide regular and focussed development on anti-racism and inclusive teaching for all staff

