SOAS Vision and Strategy 2016-2020

We live in a world of unprecedented change bringing opportunities and challenges. Technological innovation moves on apace with a major impact on how we communicate, where and how we work and how we live. Despite falling absolute poverty, inequality is increasing in some parts of the world. Climate change, intensified conflict over resources and the UK's decision to leave the European Union have increased global uncertainty, whilst growing agrarian crises combined with the politics of food security and land are fundamentally altering the relationships between the rural and urban world. Cultural diversity has grown in some places, but is often under threat globally. Global and local discourses are becoming increasingly interconnected and challenge notions of centre and periphery. How political and economic power is distributed in the world has also changed with emerging economies gaining greater influence. As a result, global governance mechanisms, established in the immediate aftermath of Second World War, now struggle to deliver peace, security and human rights.

Against this backdrop, the higher education sector in the UK and around the world continues to evolve. In the United Kingdom the shift from a Government funded higher education sector as a public good to one in which student fees are now the biggest share of university income has led to a competitive environment for students and research income, fundamentally changing the relationship between students and universities and potentially between students and their teachers. Expectations are higher. Perceptions of the role, contribution and value of education are shifting and contested. The pressures to perform well are greater. To thrive, UK universities must demonstrate excellence, pioneer new modes of thought and explanation, and challenge approaches rooted in outdated intellectual legacies. They must also negotiate the complexities of the current environment, including the threat of worldwide economic downturn, and competition from new and/or more welcoming overseas providers.

For a school like SOAS whose niche is its internationalism, the challenge of the status quo and a strong values base with a commitment to justice, diversity and equality, continuing to thrive in a market based higher education sector can pose additional challenges. We are a small research led university with excellent teaching and language and area studies specialisms in Asia, Africa and the Middle East. For us, the challenge of maintaining and balancing academic excellence and financial sustainability is even greater as there are many areas in which it is difficult for us to achieve economies of scale.

But there are also significant opportunities. Given the global challenges outlined above there has never been a better time for a school like SOAS. The world needs SOAS more than ever before. For the last 100 years we have grown and developed to take our place as a

global university, teaching and researching across a range of social science and humanities subjects, rooted in the culture and languages of the regions in which we specialise (which collectively account for over three-quarters of the world's population). We make the connections that others cannot. We have the expertise – in terms of depth and breadth. We have the understanding of cultures and contexts. We think about the world differently – from the perspective of our regions and their people. To be interconnected people need to be able to talk with each other, communicate. So SOAS has an important role to play in addressing the world's needs by:

• Challenging perspectives through its research and teaching
• Helping to build bridges in a complex world
• Applying a global lens to the critical issues of our time
• Developing graduates who can influence and make an impact throughout their careers
• Developing new intellectual and strategic partnerships

And SOAS students leave our university with the ability to:

• Challenge and interpret the world
• Connect communities and cultures
• Change and impact the world

SOAS' strength lies in using our strong language base, area studies specialisms and disciplinary expertise to show the interconnectedness of the world. By advancing knowledge and understanding of our regions and their diasporas through excellent research, teaching and independent scholarship. And through this promoting a sense of global citizenship and mutual understanding because even as our world has become more interconnected through trade, travel and global communications it also seems more fragmented requiring innovative approaches to help us understand the world's unity and complexity. Scholars at SOAS work collectively to demonstrate the interconnectedness and changing contours of the world.

We see ourselves continuing as a niche institution with regional specialisms, providing a balanced portfolio and maintaining excellence in all our areas of research and scholarship. We will need to grow to thrive but that growth will be in line with our commitment to excellence. Our base in Bloomsbury enables us to provide an intimate, welcoming and dynamic experience for our students. The opening of our new building Senate House North Block (SHNB) will further enhance that experience and we hope to consolidate our Bloomsbury campus through further development as opportunities arise. We see our overseas expansion taking place through the development of strong collaborations and partnerships with universities and institutions around the world.

We aim to:

• Produce high quality research that shapes global scholarship and learning
• Produce high quality graduates, postgraduates and researchers who understand and engage with the world and the regions in which we specialise
• Develop well rounded individuals who can make a difference in their communities and in the world
• Make an impact in the local and global communities with which we engage

The underpinning elements of this are:

- Attracting, retaining and developing world class academic and professional staff
- An organisational structure which facilitates collaboration and cross cutting work
- Use of appropriate and effective technology and learning resources
- Financial sustainability
- Staff and organisational capability for lifelong learning and ongoing renewal
- A forward looking estates strategy including development of student accommodation
- A unique and fulfilling student experience
- Developing a mutually beneficial relationship between the School and its alumni.

Our Aims

1. Produce high quality research that shapes global scholarship and learning

As a global university with regional expertise, our aim is to be the world's leading institution for research on Asia, Africa & the Middle East, based on deep knowledge of these regions, their international and global interconnections, and a wide range of disciplinary approaches. Through innovative work that engages critically with mainstream discourses and promotes a diversity of perspectives, we aim to shape scholarship across the humanities and social sciences, and promote social benefit worldwide.

We have five strategic objectives to help us achieve this aim:

- ☐ Recognition of excellence
- ☐ Regional engagement
- ☐ Disciplinary approaches
- ☐ Impact on scholarship and learning
- ☐ Benefits for society

There are four underpinning elements for our research strategy:

- ☐ Benchmarked research income – with the aim to increase overall research income to £7.5 million by 2020
- ☐ High quality early-career training
- ☐ Proactive research support
- ☐ Research integrity.

2. Produce high quality graduates, postgraduates and researchers who understand and engage with the world and the regions in which we specialise

We aim to produce high quality graduates who are global citizens who can understand and engage with the world. Our graduates should not only be able to interpret and challenge world problems, but also develop solutions to meet them. All graduates should leave SOAS with:

- Subject knowledge informed by research
- Key research, communication, and life skills for success in global careers
- International experience / exposure
- Global perspective (often underpinned by some knowledge of an African, Asian or Middle Eastern language and/or regional expertise)
- Appreciation of the importance of understanding different cultures and contexts
- An inter-connected view of the world

We shall achieve this aim through attracting and recruiting talented students, whatever their backgrounds, and providing substantive research informed teaching and scholarship that is relevant to the world's needs. We shall continue to offer a rich and distinctive portfolio at foundation, undergraduate and postgraduate level that is based on our specialisms. All students will have the opportunity to study a language, and to engage in multi-disciplinary study, recognising that most world problems are not single disciplinary in nature. In addition, students will gain exposure to the wider environment as part of their curriculum (for example, through guest speakers, case studies, interpreting national and global trends, and interactions with alumni working in relevant fields).

We shall continue to develop our pedagogy – for example building on existing work on the "flipped classroom" and problem-based learning – in order to facilitate participation, debate, critical reflection and exceptionally high levels of student engagement in our rich and distinctive curriculum.

We shall make effective use of technology to support learning, for example distance learning and blended learning.

3. Develop well rounded individuals who can make a difference in their communities and in the world

We aim to develop individuals who think differently and in depth about issues, are well-rounded academically, personally and professionally, and able to make a difference – whether locally or globally. We aim to facilitate the development of our students so that they have the skills and experience to enable them to influence and make an impact in their lives. In addition, we aim to support them to make effective career choices, as well as making them attractive to potential employers. All graduates should leave SOAS with:

- A sense of purpose and responsibility
- Openness to new ideas
- The ability to question and challenge in an effective and ethical manner
- A thirst for life-long learning
- The ability to work as part of a team
- The ability to lead others
- Employment skills and experience
- Transferable skills

We shall achieve this aim through offering students opportunities for personal development and growth through curricular, co-curricular and extra-curricular activities. Examples include ensuring students have the opportunity to:

- Study and/or work abroad
- Learn a language
- Undertake internships and other opportunities for work experience
- Undertake group projects as part of their curriculum (including with students outside their discipline) thereby gaining teamwork skills that are important for employability
- Undertake voluntary work, whether within SOAS, the wider community or overseas
- Develop leadership skills – for example leading a club or society, or becoming a student ambassador
- Engage with the potential provided by digital technology.

4. Make an impact in the local and global communities with which we engage

We aim to use our research, scholarship and teaching to make an impact in the local and global communities with which we engage in the UK and around the world. This includes influencing public debate; informing public understanding; increasing connectivity; engaging with governments, organisations and individuals (including the diaspora); undertaking public and community outreach; and supporting cultural exposure and promotion.

We shall achieve this aim by:

- Deepening knowledge and expertise about Asia, Africa and the Middle East, regions that are home to two-thirds of the world's population
- Increasing academic collaboration and intellectual exchange
- Strengthening our external focus through the development of partnerships, enterprise, knowledge exchange, outreach and networks around the world, and particularly in our regions
- Strengthening our ability to impact policy
- Strengthening our engagement with a wide set of institutions, organisations and movements.

Underpinning Elements / Supporting Themes

To achieve our aims, we need to focus on delivering a number of underpinning elements:

5. Attracting and retaining world-class academic and professional staff

To ensure the success of the School, we need to attract and retain world-class academic and professional staff. We shall achieve this through:

- Incentives
- Career paths and opportunities for development

- Creation of permanently endowed academic posts
- Offering appropriate opportunities for research
- Offering assistance and support to ensure a smooth transition for staff recruited from overseas
- Aiming to develop an increasingly diverse staffing profile, ensuring equal treatment in the recruitment, development and reward of our staff
- Developing programmes in academic and administrative leadership, and ensuring that those involved in School governance are as representative as possible of the full range and balance of SOAS staff.

Our objectives in supporting world-class staff include:

- Providing staff with a positive, supportive and stimulating working environment in which people want to work
- Supporting a fruitful academic experience
- Ensuring that SOAS staff are remunerated appropriately for their contribution, in accordance with Equality and Diversity legislation
- Supporting the Management of Change across the School
- Providing targeted Staff Learning and Development opportunities
- Promoting Equality and Diversity in all aspects of SOAS' activity and, in so doing, demonstrate leadership in the HE sector.

6. An organisational structure which facilitates collaboration and cross cutting work

It is important that our organisational structure supports our aims through the facilitation of collaboration and cross-cutting work across areas and disciplines. The desired features of the School's structure include:

- Devolved financial responsibility
- Reflect and stimulate research and teaching groups
- Collaborative
- Linking of areas and disciplines
- Enable innovation
- Transparent to negotiate.

7. Using appropriate and effective technologies and learning resources

It is important that appropriate and effective technology and high quality learning resources are used to support the School's learning, teaching and research and that this is accessible to all. This includes:

- Developing a digital vision which recognizes the way our students and staff expect to interact with the online world around them
- Reviewing all on-line student services and streamlining the processes for applying on-line to study, enroll, select courses and check timetables

- Rolling out an enhanced Student Intranet
- Transforming learning environments to create technology-rich, collaborative, inclusive and social learning spaces
- Rolling out Lecture Capture to all classrooms and lecture halls so that students can access the material after the event
- Supporting "flipped classroom" initiatives by helping lecturers prepare on-line materials via the Lecture Capture system that students can access before attending
- Ensuring that all Library holdings are fully discoverable on-line and, where digital versions exist, the user can "click through" to the full text
- Developing the SOAS Digital Library to put more of the School's unique and distinctive collections on-line.

8. Financial sustainability

In order for the School to remain financially sustainable, the achievement of a target surplus of 5% of income by 2017/18 has been agreed. This translates into a position where we not only cover our operating costs but generate sufficient funds for re-investment in the School and for meeting unforeseen adverse changes in our income or cost base.

In an environment of increasing competition, investment is key to attracting future students, particularly in view of ever increasing student expectations for high quality facilities and seamless and effective administrative processes. Competition and the transition from a relatively stable grant-funded environment to a highly volatile fee-funded environment has increased the level of cash balances we need to retain to withstand any income shocks or unexpected changes in our cost base.

We aim to achieve financial sustainability through:

- Growth in new and existing programmes (recognising the constraints of space in our Bloomsbury estate for on-campus delivery)
- Cost savings from staff and non-pay costs
- Maintaining a portfolio of activity across the School that balances our smaller-scale niche specialisms with areas of broader market appeal.

9. Staff and organisational capability for lifelong learning and ongoing renewal

Given both the changing global context and environment of higher education, it is important for the School to be proactive in managing and influencing the external environment and addressing future opportunities and challenges. This will require flexibility and adaptability at both the organisational and individual level.

To be successful, SOAS will need to have organisational capability for:

- Ongoing review of the external environment to identify emerging opportunities and challenges

- Critically reviewing existing offerings and operations to understand performance and test ongoing relevance
- Ongoing review of our offerings and operations against our core mission
- Making timely decisions and implementing any resulting changes (e.g. updating programmes to ensure relevance and attractiveness, improving administrative operations, creating new programmes to respond to new market needs, closing programmes that are no longer relevant).

In addition to the organisational level, at the individual level there is a need for:

- Opportunities for lifelong learning
- Supporting the development of financial literacy and business acumen
- Supporting the development of digital literacy and competencies
- Supporting innovation and entrepreneurial activity
- Providing opportunities for the development and external recognition of teaching skills
- Equipping staff with the skills to enable them to influence policy-makers and the public
- Supporting the development of social and ethical evaluation skills
- Strong performance management.

10. Forward looking estates strategy including development of student accommodation

Our aim is to create the best possible physical environment for the SOAS community through safeguarding and developing our listed estate. We will build upon previous good practice and seek to concentrate and expand the estate within Bloomsbury, focusing on six strategic themes:

- Expansion: developing a plan to expand the existing estate in Bloomsbury
- Campus Development Programme: ensuring that the use and layout of our buildings is well aligned with the School's wider needs and provides a modern, accessible and efficient environment in which to learn, teach and research
- Student Residential Strategy: developing a strategy that determines the best approach to securing accommodation and ensuring management arrangements are effective and deliver a high quality service
- Physical environment: maintaining the estate to an appropriate standard in a financially stable manner
- Facility Management Services: developing and delivering a portfolio of high quality facility management services that are well specified, managed and represent good value for money
- Sustainable and environmentally aware operation: ensuring a base level of environmental standards for any new buildings and a commitment to improving the environmental impact of existing buildings.

11. A unique and fulfilling Student Experience

Our aim is to provide students with a unique and fulfilling experience throughout the student journey, from pre-entry to SOAS through to employment/ further study and lifelong learning. We recognise that studying at university is a transformative experience and that students will pass through various stages of academic and personal growth as part of their university journey. We want to ensure that we provide all students with the optimum mix of support and challenge at each stage of their journey.

We want our graduates to leave SOAS with both a positive experience of their time at SOAS and a sense of belonging and life-long association with the School. To achieve this, we need to ensure a high quality experience at each stage of the student journey. For example:

- Pre-entry and Induction – including recruitment, Insight Days, induction and orientation
- Progression and Retention – including academic support, robust, challenging and relevant assessment and exams, inclusive approaches, efficient(?) administrative processes, support for studying/working abroad
- "Out-duction" – including graduation, transition to work or further study, becoming members of the alumni community, lifelong learning
- Student Life – including accommodation, clubs and societies, co-curricular, volunteering and leadership opportunities
- Health and Wellbeing – including student welfare and pastoral support, advice and guidance.

12. Developing a mutually beneficial relationship between the School and its alumni

We recognise that our alumni are a great asset to the School and we are very fortunate to have a strong and passionate alumni community. Our aim is to build on the strengths of our alumni community and areas of existing good practice of working with our alumni to further develop mutually beneficial relationships.

We recognise that alumni can contribute greatly to the school in both financial and non-financial terms, including:

- Contributing to course design, content and delivery (for example as guest lecturers)
- Serving as mentors to current students
- Providing opportunities for (and benefiting from) free student consultancy projects
- Offering internship and/or employment opportunities
- Supporting recruitment activity
- Acting as "champions" for SOAS
- Providing links to a wide range of public and professional bodies and organisations, and to communities in Africa, Asia and the Middle East
- Donating money to the School.

We also recognise that any relationships with alumni should be two-way. For example, alumni could benefit from:

- Networking
- Lifelong learning
- Support for setting up local alumni groups
- Careers advice / mentoring.