Name of Provider: SOAS University of London
UKPRN: 10007780

INTRODUCTION

1.1 SOAS University of London is the only higher education institution in Europe specialising in the study of Asia, Africa and the Middle East. We offer programmes across the social sciences, humanities and languages; students learn in a research-intensive environment and are taught by international experts across a wide range of specialised fields. In providing programmes of study not available anywhere else in the UK, and housing the UK's National Research Library for its specialist areas, the School occupies a special place in our national higher education system.

1.2 Our students join a small, diverse and dynamic community of scholars. Of our 3,000 undergraduates in the assessment period 57% were BME, 25% were mature students and 13% declared a disability, 38% came from overseas, and 45% of UK students were from the 40% most deprived areas (IMD data).[1] They join a strongly engaged and supportive community, in which the Students' Union (SU) plays an especially active role. Our SU actively leads campaigns across a wide range of issues – for example, on fossil fuel divestment, decolonisation, and of course boycotting the NSS and choosing not to contribute to the TEF submission – but is nonetheless very much engaged with the School's learning and teaching provision and with the welfare and success of our students.

1.3 SOAS students take a huge range of languages: 26 modern Asian, African, and Middle Eastern languages, nine ancient languages and six classical languages. Thirteen of these are only provided at SOAS in the UK at degree-level, while the others are offered at a select few institutions. All our undergraduate degree programmes enable students to analyse from distinctive perspectives: this includes both the content, which is focused on our regions, and the critical approaches which question orthodoxy and foster original, independent thinking. This outlook is reflected in our graduates' career paths: the common factor we frequently observe is their determination to leave the world in a better place than they found it. Our graduates progress to a particularly diverse range of employers in the UK and around the world.

Learning and Teaching at SOAS

1.4 Our commitment to excellence in learning and teaching provision, and hence to our students' success, is set out in *SOAS Vision and Strategy 2016-2020* and our *SOAS Learning Strategy*, both published in the TEF assessment period. Our learning and teaching mission is grounded in the geo-political challenges of the areas we study. We aim to:

- produce high-quality graduates 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 the world.

1.5 Our TEF metrics reflect real strengths of the undergraduate experience at SOAS, with above benchmark satisfaction for teaching, and no statistically significant difference from benchmark in both the employment and highly-skilled employment core metrics. Throughout the assessment period we have built on existing success in teaching and progression to work and study while also working to address important challenges, including aspects of academic support and assessment and feedback. We are determined not just to meet benchmarks, but to achieve the highest levels of quality in every area of our students' learning and teaching experience.

1.6 To drive change forward across all these areas we created the SOAS *Teaching Excellence and Student Engagement Programme* (TESEP), led by our Pro-Director Learning and Teaching. This harnesses the benefits of strong strategic coordination of learning and teaching enhancement at a whole-institution level. Resources are better targeted at the areas of greatest need, reporting on key initiatives is stronger, and we have clearer sight of where change is needed and the actions that are being taken. We will keep TESEP under continual review to deliver the changes our students need.

[1] TEF 3 contextual data.

1.7 Our submission ranges across the whole student journey from pre-entry to post-graduation. In particular it demonstrates the following:

- Our outstanding personalised and supportive learning provision, delivered through small group teaching including optimal levels of personal contact time as well as mentoring and skills development. This secures the highest levels of engagement and active commitment to studying from students (see 2.1-2, 6.4, 8.8-10): **Gold**
- We ensure students consistently and frequently engage with developments from the forefront of research as they progress through their degree programmes. Students are consistently and frequently directly involved in research activities, particularly through a range of often specialist modules and Independent Study Projects (7.1-7): **Gold**
- We provide outstanding physical and digital resources – our world-class library and the extensive resources of the Bloomsbury Learning Environment are used by SOAS undergraduates to enhance their learning (6.1-9): **Gold/Silver**
- We have implemented an institutional culture that facilitates, recognises and rewards excellent teaching (3.1-4): **Silver**
- Our holistic approach to widening participation, enabling students from diverse and often disadvantaged backgrounds to benefit from the higher education provided by SOAS and to achieve excellent employment outcomes (10.1-6): **Silver**
- Reformed curricula and diverse assessment practices which provide scope for high levels of stretch to ensure that all SOAS undergraduate students are significantly challenged, and acquire knowledge, skills and understanding that are valued by employers (4.1-2, 4.5, 9.5): **Silver**
- We achieve excellent outcomes for our students, in particular with regards to retention (8.2-7) and progression to highly skilled employment and further study (9.1). By collecting and analysing Careers Registration data we provide personalised learning, tailored to the needs of students at each stage in their career thinking (9.2-9). **Silver**

1.8 The combined evidence provided by the metrics and the submission demonstrates that SOAS undergraduates receive excellent teaching which consistently exceeds the rigorous national quality requirements for UK higher education. Beyond this we clearly highlight areas of Gold provision, as we continue to pursue a developmental trajectory towards the very highest quality in every area. Despite substantial areas of Gold provision, when viewed in the round, over the last three years, SOAS undergraduate provision as a whole best fits the descriptor for a TEF Silver Award.

TEACHING QUALITY

2 Student Engagement (TQ1)

2.1 Small group teaching is an important aspect of the learning experience for all of our students, through which we achieve the highest levels of engagement and active commitment to learning and study from students. Nearly half of all undergraduate modules have 15 or fewer enrolments in 2016/17 illustrating that small-group teaching is widespread at SOAS, while modules with larger enrolments also feature small-group teaching (with a maximum of 15 in a group taught by a Graduate Teaching Assistant (GTA). Empirical evidence confirms our experience that small class sizes permit more effective teaching methods, and are more effective in stimulating students' engagement with the course content.[2] In NSS 2016 (the School's most recent year of publishable data due to the NSS boycott), 93% of SOAS respondents were satisfied that their course was intellectually stimulating – the joint fourth highest result in the UK (well within the top 10% of absolute scores). NSS qualitative comments confirm that students value this high level of

[2] James Monks and Robert M. Schmidt, 'The Impact of Class Size on Outcomes in Higher Education', *The B.E. Journal of Economic Analysis & Policy*, 11/1 (2011), 1-17.

interaction with their peers and teachers in small group settings.[3] There was an average of 11 students to each member of academic staff in the period 2013/14 to 2015/16, the 6th best SSR out of all UK multi-faculty universities.[4] The introduction of the Peer Assisted Study Scheme (PASS) for mentoring also increases student engagement in small classes by helping participants build confidence and develop their communication skills (see 8.8). We plan to expand PASS mentoring through the Teaching Excellence and Student Engagement Programme.

2.2 We provide optimum levels of contact time to enable students to access appropriately challenging and rigorous content. This is demonstrated particularly clearly in language teaching, including *ab initio* routes, where intensive development of knowledge and skills is essential. Across the subject range, students taking Independent Study Projects receive one-to-one tutorials.

2.3 Students contribute to the design and review of teaching at all levels. For example:

- Module evaluation contributes to departmental planning of future teaching. This was strengthened in 2014/15 using feedback from students to focus more closely on their learning and teaching experience.
- Student representatives participate extensively in committees, staff-student fora and working groups at department and School level. Students' Union course rep training helps students develop their skills and get the most out of this experience; supported by additional university funding, the expanded SU programme now addresses decolonisation and closing the BME attainment gap.
- Reviews of teaching at programme and department levels involve students who contribute to improvements in the design of programmes and delivery of teaching (4.1-2).

2.4 Our most recent QAA review highlighted 'the students' contribution to the development of the School's educational priorities' as a feature of good practice. Largely through the Students' Union, students take the lead in identifying key issues and then the School works with them to effect change. For example:

- In 2015, SOAS and the SOAS SU were endorsed by UUK for their collaborative work tackling gender-based violence. Training was rolled out to chairs of student societies and staff members who resolve student complaints, including Heads of Department and the Pro-Directors. Through the 'Enough is Enough' campaign, the SU is promoting a consent culture at SOAS. The School has funded the SU to deliver mandatory consent workshops for all new UG and PGT students during the past two years.
- The SU campaign on decolonisation led to SOAS adopting a School *Vision and Policy for Decolonisation*. The School's subject matter is being considered by academics and course convenors as part of the wider teaching strategy. This focus demonstrates the international perspectives of SOAS students and shows how they influence the curriculum.
- The SU identified an attainment gap as an issue, undertook qualitative research focused on the experience of black students, and made 34 recommendations for action. SOAS undertook complementary quantitative research and we are continuing to work together to address this issue to build an inclusive environment for all students (10.5).
- the Students' Union worked with the Student Advice and Wellbeing team to develop a 'Guide to Inclusivity in Learning & Teaching' – this student-led work was the starting point for our Inclusion@SOAS initiative.
- The SU plays a key role in shaping our OFFA Access Agreement priorities, including increased expenditure on long-term outreach programmes.
- The SU addresses global concerns, such as refugee scholarships, Solar SOAS, and divestment from fossil fuels. As a result of this strong student voice, SOAS became the first English university in 2015 to announce that it would divest from fossil fuels. The SU campaign on decolonisation of the School's subject matter is being considered by academics and course convenors as part of the wider teaching strategy.

[3] In this published submission we do not quote NSS qualitative comments directly in order to respect the confidentiality agreement between respondents and the NSS.
[4] Analysis of HESA SSR data, downloaded from HeidiPlus.

2.5 Finally, SOAS facilitates many student-led activities: around 200 student societies operated during the TEF period, more than half associated with the culture, language or politics of Africa, the Middle East and Asia, helping students to enhance and contextualise their curriculum. For example 12 martial arts specific to their region are taught; students practise their language skills through music societies; some societies have led to the creation of external charities and social enterprises, such as Student Detainee Support and Football Beyond Borders.

3 Valuing Teaching (TQ2)

3.1 We have implemented an institutional culture that facilitates, recognises and rewards excellent teaching, by providing professional development, celebrating successes through teaching prizes, and assessing teaching performance in appointment and promotion decisions. The proportion of academic staff with formal teaching qualifications has increased from 3% to 12% in just two years. Overseen by our new Academic Teaching Development Panel, chaired by the Pro-Director (Learning & Teaching):

- We are developing a three-year action plan to improve further the quality of teaching and we have set targets to increase the proportion of academic staff with teaching qualifications year on year;
- We intend to introduce an institutional portfolio route to FHEA and SFHEA in March 2018 for experienced staff.

Existing strength in teaching is shown by the metrics: 90.3% of students were satisfied or very satisfied with the teaching on their course in the most recent reportable year (2016).

3.2 The Professional Development in Higher Education Programme (PDHEP) facilitates excellence in teaching. PDHEP launched at SOAS in 2012 and is an HEA-accredited programme aligned to the UK Professional Standards Framework (UKPSF), leading to HEA Associate Fellowship or Fellowship. The programme includes a core course which is mandatory for all new lecturers, teaching fellows and GTAs. Participation is growing significantly: in 2016-17, PDHEP modules were attended by 289 participants, an increase of 80% on the previous year; this included 137 participants on our core courses (up 50% on the previous year). We believe that this increase resulted from our scheduling of additional modules, including two additional core courses during the year. The core courses have proved very popular. In 2016-17, 94% of participants agreed that the usefulness of the course met or exceeded their expectations. A participant summed up their experience: ‘I think the workshops are very helpful in providing lots of themes, ideas and conceptions that are fundamental to successful teaching.’ We also supported direct applications to HEA during the TEF period and we are developing a portfolio route. In addition to the PDHEP, we provide digital skills training to teaching staff which enables them to use online tools to engage students in class as well as training in the use of Moodle, Turnitin and Panopto: 354 members of staff attended during 2014/15 to 2016/17. The SOAS Learning and Teaching Conference was introduced in 2015 and so far four conferences have been organised. The most recent conference in June 2017 on the theme of *Students as Partners* attracted more than 100 delegates from within and outwith SOAS and consisted of 20 presentations, of which six included student contributions.

3.3 We further recognise and promote excellence in teaching with awards such as the Director’s Teaching Prize. This celebrates inspirational and innovative teaching throughout the SOAS community, inclusive of Teaching Fellows, GTAs and academic support staff. Award themes include inclusivity and research-led teaching. Students nominate candidates for the award and there were 402 nominations in the period from 2014/15 to 2016/17 with 24 members of staff receiving an award.

3.4 SOAS rewards excellence in teaching through its HR policies: throughout the TEF period teaching performance was evaluated in all academic appointments and promotions. The Academic Peformance Framework was reviewed in 2015. With reference to UKPSF, the framework provides a promotion route based on learning and teaching performance; and promotion to Professor requires excellent or outstanding performance in learning and teaching.

4 Rigour and Stretch (TQ3)

4.1 Through a long-established cycle of Periodic Programme Reviews, we critically examine the design and delivery of our programmes of study. Students are full partners in this process which frequently results in substantive changes to course content, structure and assessment. During the TEF assessment period (2014/15 to 2016/17) a total of 143 programme amendments and 472 module amendments were made. These figures demonstrate our dedication to maintaining a quality, highly-relevant curriculum.

4.2 Since 2015/16 we have strengthened this cycle with a new and additional approach to reviewing our learning and teaching. Chaired by the Pro-Director Learning & Teaching, Curriculum Review is a collaborative enterprise bringing together academics, students and professional services staff. This approach broadens the review focus from individual programmes to the whole department, enabling a deep strategic reflection across all aspects of learning and teaching. Analysis of detailed, benchmarked data ensures decisions are evidence-based. Conducted over a period of months this reflective process is then captured in a formal, agreed action plan. As a result curricula have been restructured, assessment methods have been diversified, and personal tutoring strengthened, all of which enhances learning and helps student engage with our rigorous and stretching course content.

4.3 Many of our undergraduate students are keen to stretch themselves by studying more than one subject: the range of pathways include joint degrees, open options and non-credit bearing courses. We firmly believe in giving students the opportunity to tailor their degree according to their interests, which often evolve during their learning journey with us. Our students and their Students' Union representatives tell us loudly and clearly how much they value these opportunities. As one former student explained, 'the best thing about this course is that you can choose every module and every topic yourself, which is rare in many universities'.

4.4 This highly flexible approach is underpinned with personalised academic advice for students as they make often complex study choices from almost limitless academic pathways. We offer 240 non-language and 70 language-based open modules to undergraduates. The challenge of supporting effective student decision making is reflected in the Academic Support core metric. We have introduced module fairs and option-choice days to support student decision making, and personal tutoring has been strengthened with targeted support at key points in the academic year. We are pleased that the actions already taken have resulted in the positive trajectory shown in the core metric year splits, with an improvement of six percentage points in just one year. Through the Teaching Excellence and Student Engagement Programme we will use detailed analyses of patterns in student attainment to equip both tutors and students with information they need to make choices informed by quantitative evidence.

4.5 The grade inflation supplementary metric shows the combined proportion of firsts and 2:1 degrees declined by two percentage points since SOAS began awarding its own degrees in 2013/14. This confirms there is no evidence of grade inflation. As part of its commitment to academic rigour, SOAS works to prevent grade inflation. The School has a robust mechanism of assessment, including the extensive use of unseen exams and exam boards that scrutinise the overall performance of cohorts, identify trends and recommend solutions to address emerging concerns. Reports from External Examiners are made freely available to all staff and students online, creating greater transparency. The reports are highly positive about the curriculum and the quality of work produced by the highest-achieving students. Comments include:

- 'Some of the dissertations are exceptionally good, using the unique sources available at SOAS library and a range of primary sources.'
- 'It is clear that your first-class performers represent top quality at a national level.'

5 Feedback (TQ4)

5.1 During the TEF assessment period we have been working hard to improve the School's performance on assessment and feedback. This is reflected by the positive trajectory in the year splits with Assessment & Feedback improving by four percentage points between 2015 and 2016. As a result the double negative flag in year 1 was replaced by no flag in year 2, indicating there was no statistically significant difference from the benchmark. Our work towards this goal focused on two main areas: introducing diverse assessment, and improving marking turnaround time.

5.2 The introduction of diverse assessment methods included the following:

- We developed diverse assessment methods in partnership with the SU.
- These were implemented in each of the School's three faculties – examples include presentations, reaction papers and multimedia portfolio submissions. For instance Music students submit a radio programme, and Anthropology students report on a field visit. A chief examiner commented on 'the introduction of innovative assessment methods, which had clearly engaged students and prompted exciting work'.
- Guidance was published for module developers to help them design diverse assessment methods supporting students with disabilities and students with English as a second language.
- Assessment by exam only requires justification before it is approved, and is used infrequently.

5.3 NSS metrics confirmed that the time taken to return marked work was an area requiring improvement. An increase in student satisfaction on this measure was achieved before the TEF period and then continued: the result for Q7 (Feedback on my work has been prompt) rose by five percentage points between 2015 and 2016. Since then work has continued: detailed monitoring of work return times has been implemented across SOAS and reported centrally, with targeted monitoring of departments where the most improvement is needed.

5.4 While significant progress has been made, our ambition is to outperform the benchmark overall, and across the split metrics. To take this forward we are implementing an HEA-led project on developing inclusive assessment. Working in partnership with our students we have developed a *SOAS Vision and Policy for Inclusive Assessment*; we will be implementing assessment labs on selected programmes of study in every academic department to introduce inclusive assessment and act as a catalyst for wider change.

5.5 Through the Teaching Excellence and Student Engagement Programme we will maintain this clear focus on improving assessment and feedback through a strategic, centrally-coordinated programme of work to sustain our positive trajectory.

LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

6 Resources (LE1)

6.1 SOAS provides outstanding physical and digital resources which are used by our undergraduates to enhance their learning. Student engagement with learning resources is evidenced by assessed student outcomes (including the outcomes of research-informed teaching detailed in section 7), and enhanced by delivery of training and personalised advice from expert support staff, and the use of flexible learning spaces on our newly-expanded campus.

6.2 The SOAS learning environment was significantly redesigned during the TEF period to better meet the needs of our students. The new Paul Webley Wing opened in September 2016 finally uniting the SOAS learning community on a single campus, replacing outdated learning and teaching facilities located over a mile from the main campus. The new facilities, occupying the whole of the north block of Senate House, provide an additional 136 square metres of teaching space and almost 900 square metres of additional informal learning spaces. These learning

environments particularly meet the needs requested by undergraduates by promoting group and collaborative learning. Students engaged in the design of these spaces, recommending provision of large open spaces, asking it to reflect SOAS' image and selecting furniture that suits their needs: all these preferences were met in the final design. This £35m investment has delivered a step-change in the quality of spaces used by our students, removing wasted journey times between campuses, and bolstering in a practical way the already vibrant sense of community at SOAS.

6.3 Our world-class library, one of only five UK National Research Libraries, underpins the study of Asia, Africa, and the Middle East. The Library houses 1.3 million volumes published globally, has a major collection of archives, manuscripts, rare books and special collections, an expanding digital library and a growing network of electronic resources. E-resources are actively used, for example there were 900,000 full text downloads and 1.8 million e-book accesses in 2015/16.[5]

6.4 SOAS' stretching and rigorous curricula (4.1-5) require undergraduates to use these library resources, including material produced by scholars from our regions. Six specialist librarians who speak the vernacular languages and understand the cultures of their region, enable students to access resources including help with developing language skills. In the first two years of the TEF period, 700 staff hours were spent by Subject Librarians and the IT trainer delivering information skills sessions.[6] This training continued in 2016/17 when 98.5% of those who attended our information skills and IT training sessions felt confident using their new skill.

6.5 The library offers a spacious and attractive work environment, with one study space for every 4.6 students, compared to the RLUK mean of 7.5. Additionally, there are 487 open access workstation spaces, amounting to 10 students per workstation compared to the RLUK mean of 35.5 (2015/16 figures). SOAS was rated second in London for library resources in the NSS 2016, with a score of 91% for 'the library resources and services are good enough for my needs', which places the School 25th nationally.

6.6 A wide array of facilities further enhances the undergraduate learning experience. The School's Brunei Gallery offers major public exhibitions, congruent with the research interests of SOAS academics, and is used in BA modules and programmes on art and culture. We are engaging students with this resource through *Student Nights at the Brunei*, a programme of events that are being delivered in partnership with students.

6.7 SOAS is part of the Bloomsbury Learning Environment (BLE), which spans several institutions and allows the School to benefit from economies of scale not normally open to smaller HEIs. We can therefore offer a wide range of e-learning tools. Over the past five years, SOAS has made extensive study support materials available to students on the BLE including: English Language Skills; Information and Digital Literacy Skills, and Study Skills, covering critical thinking, reading skills, academic writing and exam techniques among other areas. In addition, a 'Support for Students' area exists on the BLE, which contains technical guides, links to useful online tools, resources for students with accessibility needs and frequently asked questions. Approximately 600 students access these materials each week.

6.8 During 2016/17 use of lecture capture scaled up significantly: there have been 3,400 unique module viewers[7] who watched over 4,200 hours of content. There is significant evidence of repeat usage with an average of six views per unique module viewer. This provision assists all students including those with specific learning needs. Panopto has been quickly established as a useful resource.

6.9 In summary we are proud of the outstanding learning resources this relatively small university provides in its central London location. We are confident that the diverse range of physical and online provision meets a wide range of needs and engages our students deeply in their learning.

[5] SCONUL 2015/16.
[6] SCONUL 2014/15 and 2015/16.
[7] 'Unique module viewers' counts each viewer per module.

7 Scholarship, Research and Professional Practice (LE2)

7.1 Teaching and research are strongly linked at SOAS, with the vast majority of academic staff undertaking both activities: 90% of SOAS researchers also teach. Comments from staff reflect that research-informed teaching is firmly embedded at SOAS:

- 'I think the description "research-led teaching" applies to all the courses that I have been involved with at SOAS over the past 14 years';
- 'All the modules I teach require students to engage with recent research'.

7.2 All four types of research-informed teaching in the HE Academy taxonomy[8] are firmly embedded in undergraduate learning and teaching at SOAS. We evidence this by presenting a series of case studies from across the range of subjects and disciplinary approaches offered at SOAS. Examples of modules where students learn research processes and methods include the following (research-oriented):

- First-years taking 'Introduction to South-East Asia' research a particular object and write about it, evaluating diverse sources and learning how to reference them all appropriately;
- In 'Historical Research: Approaches, Methods, Design', compulsory for all history undergraduates, a series of case studies are presented by different members of staff based on their own experiences of research, before students undertake group projects.

7.3 In each year of study SOAS undergraduates engage in debate in small groups with other students and staff (research-tutored). For example:

- In 'Islamic Law' students are introduced to recent research by reading articles by the module convenor before debating the issues arising in small tutorial groups;
- In 'Readings in Modern Japanese Literature', students read Japanese texts in the original languages, give presentations and participate in group discussion.

7.4 Students are introduced to research findings in an exceptionally wide range of modules, with lecturers often using their own research in their teaching (research-led). For example:

- In 'Introduction to Political Economy of Development' students develop a critical understanding of how political-economic theory plays out in development policy and practice – staff bring perspectives from their own research into the teaching of this module;
- Students taking 'Advanced Syntax' read and discuss some of the most recent papers on syntactic theory;
- In 'Gender Economics' the lecturer uses their own research on the gendered impacts of austerity policies, and on-going research on women's work in the Middle East and North Africa, as part of their teaching.

7.5 From these experiences students develop the skills and knowledge needed to undertake their own research (research-based learning). For example:

- Since 2007, students taking 'Swahili 2b: Introduction to Swahili Literature' have participated in the annual Swahili Colloquium in Bayreuth, and some have produced published work on the basis of this;
- Students taking the Independent Study Project, offered in all departments, produce a particularly diverse range of original projects. This often involves engaging with primary sources, and also includes interdisciplinary work, reflecting SOAS' specialisms.

7.6 As this series of case studies shows, there is an embedded culture of research-informed teaching at SOAS: students consistently and frequently engage with developments at the frontiers of research in each year of their degree programmes; and students are consistently and frequently directly involved in research activities.

[8] HE Academy and University Alliance, *What does research-informed teaching look like?* (2016).

7.7 The School's LLB and Senior Status LLB, which have expanded rapidly during the TEF period, are recognised by the Solicitors Regulation Authority (SRA) as Qualifying Law Degrees. Students graduating from either degree are therefore considered qualified to proceed to vocational law training.

8 Personalised Learning (LE3)

8.1 Personalised learning – where students' academic experiences are tailored to the individual – is a definitive connecting thread running through all teaching at SOAS. This embraces:

- small-group teaching through which we achieve the highest levels of engagement and active commitment to learning and study from students (2.1-2), including consistent and frequent engagement with research (7.1-7);
- our highly flexible approach to programme and module choice through which students construct stretching, individualised learning journeys (4.3-4);
- expert advice and support from specialist librarians and information skills training (6.4);
- collecting and analysing Careers Registration data to provide personalised learning tailored to the needs of students at each stage in their career thinking (9.1-2).

In this section we focus on three further aspects of personalised learning: student retention, mentoring, and academic skills development.

Student Retention

8.2 Before demonstrating how we have improved student retention (8.5-6), it is necessary to address a small-scale data issue that has significant implications for the continuation metric. We have identified errors in the historic HESA records of 19 students who entered in 2012/13 and 2013/14:

- 13 students on one-year courses in our Language Centre were successfully awarded a certificate or diploma – their enrolment was reported to HESA but their successful completion was not reported. As a result these students, who successfully completed their award, appeared erroneously in the data as non-continuations.
- One student withdrew before 1 December, so should not have been counted in the non-continuation population, but their withdrawal was not recorded correctly.
- Four first-degree students who continued with their studies were incorrectly not returned to HESA in their second year; and one student returning from interruption was wrongly recorded as a new entrant.

8.3 Our relatively small student cohorts mean that small errors of these kinds have a disproportionate impact on our benchmarked metrics. When these 19 corrections are taken into account, our continuation indicator increases by 1%, from 90.6% to 91.6%, which removes the negative flag from the core metric, putting the indicator 1.3% below benchmark.[9] The corrections also remove the negative split metrics for year 1 meaning that all of our continuation year splits have no flag. A further four negative flags are similarly removed from the split metrics for other undergraduates, mature, female and not disabled students.

8.4 If the data had been returned correctly, there would have been no negative flag, which would have resulted in an initial hypothesis of Silver for SOAS. In their rounded assessment of the metrics and the written submission, we ask the TEF Panel to take account of the positive continuation outcomes of these 19 students which have not been recorded due to administrative errors. We have since taken steps to improve data recording and reporting processes, and our reviews of more recent data confirm that these issues have been addressed.

[9] Although the data corrections are large enough to remove the negative flags, the errors in 19 records cannot be described as 'widespread and significant errors in the underlying data affecting a large proportion of the provider's records', and so do not meet the threshold for a data amendment request (HEFCE, *TEF Year 3 Procedural Guidance* (2017)).

8.5 The corrected data is, however, still below the benchmark; we are working hard to improve this indicator and we remain determined to achieve a positive flag in this area. During the TEF period we have implemented coordinated actions within our Teaching Excellence and Student Engagement Programme. For example:

- Departments have improved personal tutoring, with a particular focus on proactively engaging with students in their first term;
- We have implemented diverse methods of assessment which increased student engagement, especially where there is a greater emphasis on formative assessment;
- We have provided annual Bridging Courses for students from disadvantaged backgrounds which boosted skills; participants were more likely to progress to year 2;
- We have created the post of Retention and Success Co-ordinator and participated in an HEA Retention Project which has provided the basis for our Retention and Progression Action Plan;
- We have piloted and subsequently expanded our Peer Assisted Study Scheme (PASS) which engages students with their peers and older students to develop confidence in independent learning, while helping them develop subject knowledge and skills valued by employers;
- We reviewed and changed activity in Welcome Week and in the first weeks of term to support students at the point of entry, including both departmental programmes and central initiatives. For example, we have introduced *Strive and Thrive@SOAS* sessions in Welcome Week to support students at the point of entry.

8.6 SOAS recruits a high proportion of local UK students: 56% of UK students were local in the TEF period.[10] A large proportion of these students are from deprived areas: 59% live in IMD quintiles 1 or 2. Some of the practical challenges our students face relate to living in a large conurbation. As living costs are high it is more likely students will continue to live at home, often accepting relatively high commute times in relation to the distance travelled. We have taken a number of steps to help students access their studies:

- Given the high cost of living and travel costs, we have increased hardship funds by £80,000;
- In response to student demand, we greatly expanded the amount of flexible learning space available so students can comfortably and cheaply stay on campus for longer (6.2); as a result students can make more productive use of time between scheduled classes and more easily avoid travelling at peak times;
- We are making more resources and support available online: the library online offering is substantial (6.3); students use a wide range of e-learning tools (6.7); lecture recording scaled up significantly last year (6.8); mentoring by PhD students is conducted via Skype where this better suits the individual undergraduate's needs (8.10); all assignments are submitted electronically and students access their feedback online through Turnitin.
- More generally, and in a way that is difficult to measure, tutors take a flexible approach sensitive to the circumstances of individual students. We remain keen to learn best practice from other universities in large conurbations so we can better meet the needs of our diverse student population.

8.7 The new Paul Webley Wing is providing a single gateway to a wide range of services through the Weston Student Hub: there were nearly 26,000 student visits in the last year; in a user survey, 98% said they were helped and 100% would come back if they had another question or problem.

Mentoring and Academic Skills Development

8.8 Targeted support has been introduced for students on challenging modules through piloting of the Peer Assisted Study Scheme (PASS) in 2016/17, and subsequent expansion of the scheme. For first-year participants PASS:

- Provided a safe but challenging environment for new students to discuss ideas, share problems and find their own solutions to them, including during their first term at university, which aided the transition into higher education;

[10] TEF 3 Contextual Data.

- Put new students on the path towards becoming autonomous learners by encouraging them to work out their own solutions to given challenges;
- Fostered a sense of community and belonging; for example, 94% of participants in the PASS pilot felt confident in demonstrating their skills in networking with peers – this positive response is a valuable indicator that the scheme aided student retention;
- Developed students' knowledge of the particular module content which in itself helped build confidence; in the PASS pilot 78% of participants felt confident in demonstrating their understanding of course content.

8.9 Our students in higher years who trained as PASS leaders, according to an accredited international model, developed valuable employability skills, through facilitating sessions and promoting the scheme by speaking in lectures. PASS leaders also reported that the scheme helped them develop their own subject knowledge through facilitating the learning of first year students. It is clear that the introduction and expansion of PASS at SOAS has brought enormous benefits for all participants by smoothing the transition to HE, helping retention, enhancing subject knowledge and facilitating employment-related skills development.

8.10 Other forms of mentoring and academic skills development include:

- One-to-one study skills tutorials provided by PhD students for undergraduates, in person or through Skype, to enable more flexible access: over 500 tutorials were held in the TEF period, with over 95% of participants in each annual survey agreeing that the usefulness of the tutorial met or exceeded their expectations.
- Academic skills workshops which develop students' academic literacy and study skills, supplemented by subject-specific sessions: over 400 students attended in the TEF period – last year 93% said the usefulness of the workshops met or exceeded their expectations.
- Digital literacy skills training, helping students access online resources including tools for referencing and effective academic writing: nearly 400 students attended in the first two years.
- Foundation degrees which prepare international students for study at SOAS and other universities; pre-sessional and in-sessional courses for SOAS international students.

8.11 As this section has shown, personalised learning features throughout the SOAS student journey, spanning seminars and tutorials, skills training, mentoring, and careers advice.

STUDENT OUTCOMES AND LEARNING GAIN

9 Employment and Further Study (SO1); Employability and Transferable Skills (SO2)

9.1 SOAS achieves excellent outcomes for its undergraduate students in terms of the proportion entering highly-skilled employment and further study. We support our students by developing their career thinking at every stage from pre-entry to post-graduation. By applying reflective learning theory[11] to the stages of career thinking we better meet the differing needs of our students.

9.2 This understanding of students' priorities, and associated tailoring of provision, has progressed enormously at SOAS by implementing *Careers Registration*, a HEFCE learning gain project. Originally voluntary (but with 65% participation) careers registration is now a compulsory element of student enrolment. Registration results in students engaging at an early stage with their careers thinking: the importance of this was underlined by recent analysis showing nearly half of new entrants had received no careers advice prior to entry. Our analysis of the data then informs the provision we offer, whether that is sessions on finding internships for History of Art students, or delivering employer campus visits to meet students expressing their interest in Consultancy, to give just two examples. The registration data shows us that SOAS students' stage of career thinking is broadly in line with the national average; through the Teaching Excellence and Student

[11] Graham Gibbs, *Learning by Doing: A Guide to Teaching and Learning Methods* (1988); David Kolb, *Experiential Learning: Experience as the Source of Learning and Development* (1984).

Engagement Programme we will continue to use this rich data to strategically target our provision in order to maximise students' learning gain.

9.3 We also engage harder to reach students, building on initial careers registration: examples include the annual survey which is answered by students who have not yet visited Careers, and our strong social media presence. We use this student engagement to improve provision: because students have told us that peer-to-peer was their preferred channel for careers advice, we are featuring alumni blogs through social media; student views captured in careers registration data help us choose which industry to highlight each week.

9.4 We achieve high levels of engagement with SOAS students: the new accommodation in Paul Webley Wing provides a modern space that promotes student engagement with the Careers service as part of a suite of services located around the busy student hub (8.7). Face-to-face individual support plays a crucial role with over 1,400 appointments in 2016/17; students meet a diverse range of employers on campus – we held 69 events in 2016/17.

9.5 We recognise that the knowledge, skills and understanding valued by employers are continually changing. For example, one prominent survey of leading HR professionals found that in 2020, when our current first years graduate, the top three skills valued by employers will be complex problem solving, critical thinking and creativity.[12] SOAS graduates develop these employability skills to a high level, through the combination of challenging curriculum content (4.1-5), a teaching style that stretches students through debate and critique (2.1-2), and the broad range of co-curricular provision we fund and support, much of which is led by students themselves (2.5).

9.6 We promote students' development of the skills and experiences valued by employers by delivering a continuously evolving programme of activities that span academic and co-curricular provision. For example:

- We are piloting integration of careers into the curriculum – Careers is working closely with History to develop ways of integrating careers in the History curriculum.
- A new final-year Professional Placement module in Development Studies enables student to: gain workplace experience in a relevant organisation; prepare for future employment by developing CV and interview skills; develop professionally by delivering an assessed presentation under timed conditions.
- Our well-established Outreach Student Ambassadors scheme enables students from widening participation backgrounds to develop key skills valued by employers; nearly all participants recognised they had developed their employability and leadership skills (10.4).
- Since 2015/16 we have been running *Microplacements*, where students practise applying for placements by producing CVs and undertaking interviews. All participants benefit from learning how to apply successfully, and the last two years, placements were found for over 70% of participants.
- In 2015 we launched *SOAS Impact*: through this crowdfunding scheme we support groups of students who run their own projects, developing transferable skills including project management, social media marketing, and copywriting. With our support, SOAS students have so far launched 17 projects raising over £74,000, ranging from fundraising for solar panels to publication of the Sylheti Language Storybook, part of a long-term student-led project working with the local Sylheti community in Camden to support this language.

All these activities help students build confidence, continually develop their career thinking, and acquire the skills and techniques needed to achieve their career goals.

9.7 Although core DLHE metrics show no statistically significant difference from our benchmark, our goal is to exceed the benchmark for all students. SOAS is responding to the warning sign provided in the most recent year of data which was 3.2% below benchmark, a difference equivalent to the outcomes of around 11 students. The largest negative difference in the split metrics is for

[12] World Economic Forum, *The Future of Jobs* (2016)

female students (2.5% below benchmark, equivalent to almost 5 students a year). In this area we plan to deliver workshops to undergraduates on gender communication differences and strategies, building on previous pilot sessions for postgraduates.

9.8 The difference from the benchmark for sustained employment or further study (LEO supplementary metric) is accounted for by the large proportion of SOAS graduates who work or study abroad after graduation whose activity lies outside the scope of this data: the most recent longitudinal DLHE results show 4.8% of all SOAS UK graduates from undergraduate degrees were working abroad. This issue disproportionately affects SOAS which had the second-highest proportion of UK graduates working abroad in 2015/16 out of all UK universities.[13]

9.9 SOAS graduates progress to a diverse range of sectors and employers. This includes established routes (for example recent graduates have become trainee accountants, business consultants, and legal professionals). At the same time recent SOAS graduates have followed less typical routes, including NGO programme management in the Civil Service, policy analysis for charities, and a content manager for a non-profit children's educational radio station broadcasting across Africa. These examples show there is no such thing as a typical SOAS graduate. We actively support our students long after graduation: all our events are open to alumni as well as current students. SOAS alumni are also partners in our work, sharing their stories and inspiring the next generation.

10 Positive Outcomes for All (SO3)

10.1 We take a holistic approach to widening participation that enables students from diverse backgrounds to discover their potential, progress to higher education, and achieve their goals, by supporting them at every stage of their student journey.

10.2 Pre-entry and outreach activity is substantial yet strictly targeted, focused on learners with the most to gain, from schools in areas of socio-economic disadvantage across London and neighbouring regions. We reached more than 9,000 learners from under-represented backgrounds in the TEF period:

- We attract a diverse student population from London to SOAS: in 2016/17 we saw a 50% increase in enrolments from local London students who took part in our outreach activities.
- Evaluation shows we are raising aspirations: 70% of post-GCSE outreach participants believed more strongly they would go to university; over 80% of participants in post-GCSE long-term sustained outreach said they were helped to fulfil their potential.
- Positive and proactive outreach has had a positive impact on retention: participants in our pre-entry activities who came to SOAS were 8% more likely to progress to year 2 during the TEF period.
- Targeted long-term engagement is working: for example, our History Partnership with Morpeth School, in Bethnal Green, is bringing our work on decolonising the curriculum into schools, raising A-level attainment, and attracting students to SOAS to study further from a decolonised perspective.

10.3 At admission we take a comprehensive approach to evaluating applicants' potential, by taking their educational and economic background into account as well as grades. This, combined with our commitment to proactive and targeted outreach, has paid dividends. For example:

- The number of undergraduates with no parental experience of HE increased by over a quarter during the TEF period;
- SOAS consistently recruits above benchmark for the proportion of disabled students;

[13] DLHE 2015/16: the proportion of UK first degree graduates working abroad out of all UK first degree graduates in employment. Excludes specialist HEIs.

- 45% of UK students came from the 40% most deprived areas in the TEF period;[14]
- The diversity of our student body is reflected by the SU creating the post of Working Class Officer.

10.4 A range of initiatives and support services targeted at those most at risk of not achieving positive outcomes further help our students achieve success after enrolment.

- Week-long pre-sessional Bridging courses give key groups a head-start:
    - This year 92% of young students (from LPNs, or state-educated first generation) agreed that they gained study skills to help fulfil their potential (compared with 28% who agreed they had these skills before the course);
    - Across the whole TEF period Bridging course attendees were 4% more likely to progress into year 2 than the average for all students from similar backgrounds;
    - Online forums now support Bridging course students over the summer before entry and e-mentoring is offered during the first term: 95% of respondents felt the summer forums helped them feel more confident starting university, and over 70% of e-mentor participants felt this made their transition to university smoother. Based on this success we will make online Bridging forums available to all students.
- We employ approximately 100 students a year from WP backgrounds as Outreach Student Ambassadors to deliver interactive taster workshops based on their subject to pupils in target schools. This well-established scheme helps engage pupils as they work with students they can identify with. It enables WP students to enhance skills valued by employers: over 90% found that working as an Outreach Student Ambassador improved their employability, public speaking, leadership and people skills.
- We have increased hardship funds by £80,000 to help students meet London living and travel costs.
- We provide Student Advice and Wellbeing services that help students with particular needs to complete their studies successfully through provision of specialist advice and support. The number of students declaring a disability increased by a quarter during the TEF period, including a 55% increase in the number with mental health difficulties. We have been working hard to meet the associated increase in demand for our services. The numbers of students seen for Counselling grew by 24% during the TEF period, reaching 600 in 2016/17.
- We build greater support into programmes that we have identified as having high levels of students with mitigating circumstances.
- The piloting and expansion of PASS is targeted at students on challenging modules, enabling them to increase subject knowledge while building a range of skills crucial for achieving successful outcomes, including networking with peers and becoming autonomous learners (8.8-9).

10.5 We collaborate with the SU across a range of educational priorities, including work on the attainment gap between white and BME undergraduates. Based on research undertaken by both the SU and SOAS (2.4), we are continuing to work together to address disparities in the experience of students from BME backgrounds, linking with actions already identified in the School's Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Action Plan. A KPI will be monitored at Academic Board, we will extend unconscious bias training, and continue to monitor data on retention and attainment. Through the Teaching Excellence and Student Engagement Programme, we are now implementing a BME mentoring scheme to help students feel more connected to SOAS, develop personal and academic confidence, and better access help and support.

10.6 We are pleased to report DLHE metrics above benchmark for students from deprived areas (IMD quintiles 1-2), while continuing to monitor outcomes across the split metrics (9.7). As this section has shown our holistic approach to widening participation encompasses the entire learning journey from pre-entry to post-graduation.

[14] TEF 3 contextual data.

CONCLUSION

11 The SOAS Learning Journey

11.1 This submission has demonstrated that SOAS has a diverse and inclusive community of students and staff; we actively engage our students in challenging programmes of study delivered in small classes with optimal contact time; students use the specialised resources of our world-class library in their studies; our students progress to a particularly diverse range of employment in the UK and around the world. As the summary shows (1.7) there is evidence of areas of Gold provision, while overall, SOAS best fits the descriptor for a Silver award.

11.2 We have clear and targeted strategies (embodied in our Teaching Excellence and Student Engagement Programme) for building on our strengths and further improving the learning experiences and successes of our students, and we have demonstrated positive progress against those aims. By continuing to implement the changes identified in this submission we will strive to deliver the best possible experience for every SOAS student – our determination remains to enable each of our students to discover their unique contribution to the world.