

Research & Knowledge Exchange Strategy

2021-26

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SOAS Research & Knowledge Exchange Strategy

A global lens on the critical issues of our time

The world needs SOAS more than ever before. We think about the world differently. Our expertise is deeply and uniquely rooted in understanding the political, social, economic, historical and cultural dynamics of Africa, Asia, the Middle East and their diasporas, which collectively account for over three-quarters of the world's population. We make connections and build bridges, applying a global lens to the critical issues of our time. Our internationalism and our commitment to justice, diversity, equality and the highest ethical standards infuse all that we do.

Goals

- **advance knowledge and understanding** of Africa, Asia, the Middle East and their diasporas, reframing the way in which the regions in which the majority of the world's citizens live are represented, promoting a sense of global citizenship and mutual understanding, and bringing a more comprehensive and nuanced understanding of global challenges;
- **use our knowledge and our skills** to inform action to challenge inequalities, injustice, prejudice and discrimination, and to change mindsets and discourses, policies and practices;
- **decolonise** our modes of knowledge acquisition, communication, exchange and debate, from research methodologies and partnerships to writing and publishing practices;
- **expand our connectivity** and reach through a constellation of partnerships and networks, research collaborations, visiting, joint- and practice-based appointments, becoming a beacon for equitable research partnerships;
- **foster research leadership** at all levels and equip and inspire a new generation of researchers.

To achieve these goals, we will re-centre research excellence and intensity, placing this at the very heart of our institutional mission.

Objective 1: Create an Enabling Environment

Outstanding research requires an institutional environment that enables research and researchers. We will:

- tackle institutional barriers to research intensiveness, including through building stronger links between research and teaching and administrative, teaching and systems efficiencies to release time for research and knowledge exchange;
- create an equitable and inclusive research culture, including through a more just distribution of academic leadership and administrative labour, measures that reckon with the impact of structural discrimination on research careers, and support for people with caring responsibilities;
- increase professional support for research and knowledge exchange, including for administering and managing projects, effective contracting, timely payments, including skills development and peer-to-peer support in the management and administration of large grants;
- cultivate a strong and well-supported postgraduate and early career researcher community, closely integrated into our overall research agenda, and develop effective, well-run and responsive doctoral training programmes and support structures for doctoral researchers.

Objective 2: Build and Develop Capacity

At the heart of a successful research-intensive university are its researchers. We will:

- attract, retain and develop excellent researchers, with a strategic focus on building critical mass, fostering a new generation of research leaders and creating a pipeline from under-represented groups into academic careers;
- invest in researcher development, providing support to researchers at all stages to incubate grant, research and publication ideas, learn about and experiment with research methodologies, get support with writing through clinics, workshops and retreats, and tap into expert guidance and inspiration on research communications;
- create a dedicated support facility for consortia-based and other large grants that build on our unique regional and global research portfolio and strengths;
- foster the development of a new generation of academic leaders, putting in place specialist leadership training for emerging and established research leaders;
- support PhD and early career researchers through providing funding opportunities, research infrastructure, training and networking facilities, including developing innovative approaches to doctoral education that enable broader and more flexible engagement, through online, blended and practice-based learning.





Objective 3. Foster Ideas and Build Connections

Excellence in research grows out of the opportunity to develop innovative ideas and seed them in wider intellectual communities. We will:

- stimulate and support ideas-making and creativity, using our internal funds and support structures to create opportunities for building and scaling up, inspiring and developing big ideas that can have a real impact;
- establish the SOAS Collaboratory as a crucible for interdisciplinary and externally focused collaborative initiatives, to enable staff and students to learn, experiment, experience and reflect and develop mutually beneficial, ethical, equitable, engaged, and collaborative relationships with local, regional and global organisations;
- use our regional and thematic centres and institutes to build critical mass of expertise in key areas and as anchors in building new partnerships with influential universities and engage civil society, business and policy audiences in our regions of expertise;
- develop a Decolonising Research and Knowledge Exchange Toolkit aimed at embedding the principles of our Decolonising Research Statement and the SOAS Decolonising Vision into our everyday research and knowledge exchange practices;
- establish a Research and Knowledge Exchange Partnerships Policy that places the principles of equity, transparency and inclusion at the heart of our international research partnerships;
- foster an approach to collaboration, social and cultural innovation in work with civil society, government and business that extends throughout and beyond the research lifecycle, from inception to knowledge exchange, expanding our engagement with knowledge exchange activity to at least 50% of our researchers.

Objective 4. Increase our Visibility and Influence

Changing mindsets, discourses, policies and agendas calls for us to pay more attention to external engagement and to creating opportunities for SOAS research to be more widely read and used. We will:

- invest in the skills, connections and networks to enable SOAS and our partners to become more effective communicators and influencers, amplifying our public engagement, impact and visibility in global debates on the critical issues of our times. This includes the SOAS Influencing Corridors of Power (ICOP) initiative where academics and parliamentarians in Westminster work together to improve policy, and the use of regional institutes and centres for outreach;
- target the widest possible audiences with our publications and showcase and amplify the voices of SOAS researchers, especially those from under-represented groups in academia, through a more dynamic web presence, the production of high-quality visual, audio and written communications, a revamped open access repository and our bi-annual Festival of Ideas;
- build and consolidate relationships to better serve London's diaspora communities and facilitate stronger connections with Africa, Asia and the Middle East through our Centres and Institutes, facilitating engagement for our researchers with local, national, regional and international authorities and organisations, parliaments, professional bodies and grant-makers.

By 2026, we will have:

- *amplified our engagement* with scholarly and wider audiences: in five years' time we will be generating an institutional average of three research pieces per academic per year, to include blogs, exhibitions and films;
- *enhanced the quality of our academic output*, with each academic publishing at least three high-quality research outputs (weighted for books) over the next five years;
- *increased the volume and value of research grant awards by 30%*, with a particular focus on larger, consortium-based awards with international partners in our regions of expertise;
- *extended the visibility and reach* of our research, as more of our work is cited year on year, with an increase of at least 10% in our overall citations;
- *created an attractive and innovative environment for PhD and early career researcher development*, improving every stage of the doctoral and ECR journey, from training and supervision to collaborative working, to funding and support, evidenced in greater satisfaction with our training and research environment;
- *developed 3-5 strategic partnerships with universities* in Africa, Asia and the Middle East as a vehicle for joint research bids and collaboration in research and researcher development;
- *enhanced dialogue* between academics' research and policy makers in government, here and abroad, as evidenced in an ample body of case study material illustrating our impact;
- *expanded collaborative research and knowledge exchange* with NGOs, government departments and business, developing and embedding an approach to partnership that emphasises equity and mutual benefit, evidenced in a doubling of our HEIF-able income from knowledge exchange and the engagement of 50% or more of our academic staff in knowledge exchange.

