Research excellence at SOAS

Executive summary

As part of the wider agenda on sustainability at SOAS, and in the wake of the results of the 2014 Research Excellence Framework, this paper sets out the following draft vision and strategy for research excellence in the School, drawing on the School's existing Vision and Strategy:

> "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.."

From this core vision, five strategic objectives are identified, together with four underpinning elements. Progress to date on each of these is as follows:

Strategic objectives

- *Recognition of excellence*: A REF steering group has been established, including research leads for each discipline; interviews have been scheduled for a new research excellence manager; and a league table working group re-established with research included within its remit. Together, it is hoped that this should provide strong strategic oversight of research excellence in the School, with a focus on REF2020 but also paying attention to other external avenues through which research excellence is formally recognised.

- *Regional engagement*: Our approach to the field of area studies has been reviewed, and a new and more focused engagement is under development, led by our regional institutes. In addition, a strategic partnerships working group has been established to align engagement with each of our regions across research, teaching and outreach. It is hoped to align a bottom-up process of formalizing links involving individual academics and departments with a strategic approach that promotes consistency and coherence.

- *Disciplinary approaches:* Every Unit of Assessment has produced a research strategy and revised this in light of comments in early 2016, and in the case of History and Development Studies, in the light of comments received in an external review. There are examples of 'good practice' both in research strategy, and new strategies have been written from scratch for Modern languages & linguistics and Culture & media studies (as well as Area studies, noted above). Each of these units is expected to submit either new or substantially altered groups of staff.

- *Impact on scholarship and learning:* Our impact on scholarship is primarily delivered through research outputs, for which working group has been established to monitor progress. So far, all Departments have proposed mechanisms for review of outputs that include external oversight. The working group will agree a process to be implemented in each discipline by May 2016. A review of outputs currently on SOAS Research Online

suggests three-quarters of staff have already produced items for assessment, although not all Departments have yet uploaded all of their publications. However, in disciplines where monographs are important, the number of monographs produced in 2014 and 2015 falls somewhat short of what is needed. It is more difficult to measure our impact on (teaching &) learning, although this is in part delivered through training of PhD students (see below). This is an area we aim to develop over the coming year.

- *Benefits for society:* Over the past year, a newly appointed Impact Officer has developed a School-wide impact strategy, including an Impact Acceleration Fund, impact lunches, and a school-wide impact repository. Most Units of Assessment have identified a good range of potential impact case studies, although work is needed on unit-level impact strategies, and monitoring of impact. The School's response to the HE Green Paper has also made clear our commitment to research-informed teaching.

Underpinning elements

- *Benchmarked research income:* Research income has risen ahead of target in 2014-15, with a three-fold increase in the volume of grant applications since the second half of the last REF period, and a 40% increase in the volume secured. Nonetheless, concerns remain about potential future income in some Departments, and the fact that a minority of staff are not currently engaged with external funding activity.

- *High quality early-career training:* Data on PhD completions was still awaited at the time of compilation of this report. There are some concerns around a lower than expected intake of new PhD students in 2015-16 (perhaps reflecting the REF poor results and loss of AHRC funding). However, evidence suggests we remain on track with PhD completions, whilst efforts are ongoing both to secure a continuation of ESRC funding, and to develop one or more international doctoral training partnerships.

- *Proactive research support:* We have improved the quality of support in the research office, introducing universal access to Research Professional with tailored profiles, hosting funder visits, impact lunches, academic staff training, research coffee mornings and drop-in sessions and attendance at Department and Faculty meetings. Whilst work is required to encourage greater engagement with this support, feedback so far is positive and constructive. We have also introduced a new research leave policy. A next key step is the introduction of a Research Management System, for which we are currently considering tenders.

- *Research integrity:* We have worked to roll out a new research ethics policy, and have begun (in early 2016) the roll-out of online training in research integrity.

Across each of these areas, an action list has been developed, which is outlined in section 4.

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Research excellence at SOAS

1. Introduction

This is an exciting time for the School: as we approach our centenary in 2016-17, we aim to make a positive difference in a changing world, through excellent research and teaching and through our profound engagement with Asia, Africa and the Middle East.

In many respects, SOAS research is first rate. Over the past year alone, four of our scholars were elected as Fellows of the British Academy, we secured three prestigious new research awards from the European Research Council totalling over £4 million, and we rose over 50 places in the QS World Rankings. Our work has contributed to positive change, whether amongst the Dalit communities of India or African migrants, or through improved understanding of world religions from Islam and Christianity to Jainism and Zoroastrianism, and world music from the kora to the gamelan.

In particular, we are known around the world for our deep knowledge of the languages, cultures and histories of the regions in which we work, regardless of whether our research is in the humanities or the social sciences. Our researchers engage with original sources whether in archives or in the field; our students are taught to do so too.

Crystalising this desire for research excellence, in 2015 the School's Academic Board approved a framework strategy around research excellence that included three key strands: world-leading research; a vibrant research environment; and high quality partnerships (see box 1). However, given a disappointing REF result in 2014, Academic Board also specifically asked for a process which would monitor progress towards REF goals (publications, impact, research income) on an annual basis in the Spring, overseen by a School-wide REF steering group chaired by the Pro-Director (Research & Enterprise).

> **Box 1: Core research objectives, 2015**
> 1: Produce world-leading research accessible to, and used by academic communities across the world.
> > 1.1 Produce research publications that demonstrate a major contribution to all of the School's disciplines
> > 1.2 Promote research at all levels, including staff, postgraduate and undergraduate students
>
> 2: To create a vibrant research environment, including strong engagement in international networks
> > 2.1 Retain and attract world-leading researchers, producing world leading research and impact
>
> 3: High quality partnerships to enhance the School's strategic research priorities
> > 3.1 Develop and sustain strategic research partnerships with at least one top-ranking university in each of: China, India, Korea, Japan, Africa and the Middle East
> > 3.2 Develop multi-institution, multi-disciplinary, multi-year research collaborations, with external funding

This report constitutes the first report on progress towards research excellence following REF 2014. At present it is impossible to provide some key detail on progress, as our attention has of necessity focused on putting in place essential personnel and mechanisms for such a detailed review to take place. Instead, the following section sets out a core research vision and a series of specific objectives and underlying elements that are broadly aligned with the REF which, if approved, could form the basis for robust monitoring in the future. Following presentation of this vision and strategy in section 2, progress to date is summarised where possible in section 3 and key actions identified in section 4. Annexes provide the reviews provided to date by each Department/UoA, separately for outputs and the wider research and impact strategy.

2. Research excellence vision and strategy: a draft for consultation

An initial difficulty in reviewing progress in the delivery of research excellence is the absence of an accepted vision for what research excellence means at SOAS, and how we believe we can achieve this. For example, although the School's vision and strategy published in 2012

and looking forward to 2020 contains references to research, talking of our aim to provide a 'distinctive coverage of disciplines in the humanities and social sciences', to 'build high quality undergraduate programmes that are informed by research', and 'have an impact on the world', this vision and strategy does not contain specific reference to a research vision or strategy. In particular, it lacks reference to research *excellence*, even though the School's academic reputation is in many respects dependent on the excellence of its research.

To fill this gap, and as a starting point for monitoring in the future the following is suggested as a core research vision for the School:

> *"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."*

If accepted, this vision can be distilled into five more specific strategic objectives, as well as four underpinning elements. These are outlined below, together with a brief explanation as to why they have been chosen, and what they mean for the School in practice. Where possible, they are expressed in terms of a quantitative indicator that can be monitored (see box 2); however, the key issue of importance is less the detailed quantitative target, where mentioned, but the overall thrust that each area is core to our research reputation, and in turn for the overall reputation of the School.

Strategic objectives

2.1 Recognition of excellence

At the core of research excellence is our ability to *demonstrate*, externally, that our research is excellent. In this context our strategy should be to ensure our research is internationally recognized as outstanding not only for the School as a whole, but also across a range of social science and humanities disciplines, including a focused contribution to Area studies. At present, the School has 13 academic departments, and submitted work for assessment across 10 units in the 2014 Research Excellence Framework, with the second largest submission in the UK respectively in Area studies and Development studies.

It is proposed that we should continue to engage in research in all of these areas, but also develop further areas within the social sciences and humanities if a strong intellectual and business case can be mobilized. Our aim in each sub-panel will be to ensure that we are **ranked in the top 25% of all submitted units in REF2020**, or within the top five in units where there are less than 20 institutions submitted. In REF 2014, only one Department (Music) met this objective. We also aim to improve our ranking in the QS and THE world surveys, ensuring that greater research excellence contributes to a **top-200 position internationally in QS and THE** for the School as a whole. In 2014, we were ranked at 331st in QS, and did not appear in THE as we fell below the threshold for publication volume (see below).

2.2 Regional engagement

Following a disappointing result for our Area studies submission in REF 2014 (one of the largest submissions in the School, and nationally in this unit of assessment), we have conducted a comprehensive review of our approach to Area studies. An independent review by Simon Dixon (UCL), highlighted a number of issues, including that we had produced too few monographs (26 from 46 staff); did not double-weight any; had too long a 'tail' of staff with weak outputs, including too little work that had been subject to rigorous peer review in

academic journals. This review also noted the School's lack of clear strategy – either for research or impact – with poorly written documentation that was too defensive, with too little attention was paid to the headings set out by HEFCE, and too much focus on individuals, rather than our collective aims or purpose.

In response, a new and more focused strategy for Area studies is under development, led by two new regional institutes that were established in the wake of the last REF submission. In addition, a strategic partnerships working group has been established to align engagement with each of our regions across research, teaching and outreach. It is hoped to align a bottom-up process of formalizing links involving individual academics and departments with a strategic approach that promotes consistency and coherence, and ensures **at least one strategic partner in each of the School's regions**.

2.3 Disciplinary approaches

Box 2: Key indicators for each strategic objective	
Strategy/element	**Key indicator**
Recognition of excellence	Top 25% overall ranking for every unit in REF 2020
	Top 200 position in QS and THE
Regional engagement	One strategic partner per region
Disciplinary approaches	An updated research strategy for every UoA
Impact on scholarship	At least 200 peer reviewed journal articles published each year
	25% research outputs ranked world-leading in the social sciences; 33% in the humanities
Research impact	One new 'outstanding' case of research impact for every 100 staff per year

Essential to research that has an impact on scholarship and wider society is a need for an ambitious collective strategy. Yet feedback on the School's REF2014 submissions – not just in Area studies – commonly cited the lack of a clear strategy for research, or for research impact: as a result, only two Departments (Linguistics and History of Art) were ranked in the top quartile for their 'research environment'.

The significance of research and impact strategies goes beyond REF performance: only through maintaining an up-to-date strategy at discipline level can the School plan for how it will support Departments and their researchers to deliver excellent research and wider public benefit in line with our institutional vision. On this basis, our objective is that **every Unit of Assessment should have a research & impact strategy**, which is reviewed and updated on an annual basis, and evidenced through the production of case studies of our research impact that can be showcased both within and beyond the REF framework.

2.4 Impact on scholarship and learning

We need to be producing enough research outputs, of sufficient quality, to ensure these contribute to setting research agendas internationally. In practice, this means, firstly, producing **at least 200 articles in peer-reviewed academic journals each year**, since both the QS and THE world rankings rely in part on citation rates linked to *Scopus*, an online database, and these set a minimum cut-off of academic articles at this level for inclusion. We currently fall above this threshold for QS, but below it for THE (the two adopt different methodologies). It is of considerable reputational importance that the School is ranked by both measures – indeed, failure to appear in these rankings means that we have been

removed from lists of UK institutions that qualify for state-funded bursaries in some countries (e.g. Norway, Pakistan), with a significant impact on our student body.

In addition, evidence from the 2014 REF showed that top 25% institutions had at least **25% of outputs ranked 'world-leading' in the social sciences, and 33% in the humanities**. Six Departments met this threshold in REF2014 (Anthropology, Law, Linguistics, Music, Religions, History of Art) – our aim is that all should do so in REF2020.

In relation to impacts of our research on teaching, we are yet to develop a metric or measure to encapsulate how we can monitor progress. This is a key task for the coming year.

2.5 Benefits for society

A final element of our vision is that our research should be of wider societal benefit, contributing to positive global change. Yet although this expectation of active engagement with the wider world is core to the self-identity of many in SOAS, and the School is involved in numerous activities to promote and disseminate its research, evidence from REF 2014 suggests that we have at best been unable to articulate how this has translated into broader societal change. Specifically, top quartile institutions were producing on average one 'case study of 'outstanding' impact for every twenty members of academic staff – which would require SOAS to produce around **three new outstanding case studies of research impact per year**. Over the past REF assessment period, the School produced only four such case studies, with the result that only two units of assessment (Management and Politics) were in the top quartile for their discipline for research impact.

The School should also take steps to ensure that excellent research informs its teaching. There is no question that this is the case at present; however, we do not currently have a systematic way for ensuring that this is the case, or to demonstrate it. This may become more important at the Teaching Excellence Framework is introduced.

Underpinning elements

2.6 Benchmarked research income

A benchmarking exercise conducted in 2014 and repeated in 2015 showed that although our research income performance matches that of other top institutions in some subjects, it is significantly lower in others, such that overall our income is only half that of a comparable university focused on the humanities and social sciences. Our aim is therefore has already been set through Faculty plans to **raise research income overall to £7.5m by 2020**. It is critical that research income is generated, both to facilitate excellent research and to minimize the extent to which research needs to be cross-subsidized from student fees.

External research income won in open competition from research councils or otherwise through a process of peer review is also an important indicator of the prestige of our research and the extent to which it is aligned with cutting edge thought in each of our disciplines. In this context, the School's Academic Performance Framework approved in 2015 already sets the expectation that **all staff will be involved in externally-funded research, or have sought external research income**, within a three-year period.

2.7 High quality early-career training

In a number of sub-panels in REF 2014 the School was praised on the quality of its PhD supervision, with the volume of completions on a par with benchmark comparators and meeting a target of 80% completion within 4 years (full-time, or 7 years part-time). In this

context, our objective is now **to maintain the overall volume of PhD completions,** ensuring at least 80% completion within 4 years (FT) through delivery of high quality training for PhD students and other early career researchers. The School's Academic Performance Framework also sets an expectation that **all academic staff will be engaged in PhD supervision**. We will also focus on increasing the availability of PhD scholarships, including through active engagement with doctoral training partnerships both in the UK and overseas.

2.8 Proactive research support

A Research & Enterprise Office was only created at SOAS in 2009, and over the last REF period provided only basic support to the School's researchers, with minimal IT infrastructure and a largely reactive approach to grant opportunities. Evidence suggests that not only in other UK HEIs, but also in HEIs across Asia, the Middle East and parts of Africa, a much more systematic approach is taken to research support, backed by state-of-the-art research information systems and proactive engagement with funders.

In this context, our aim is both to build our in-house capacity, and to engage directly with research support offices in Asia, Africa and the Middle East to enhance internationally-facing research support for the humanities and social sciences. Our objective is to improve the quality of support provided for research, including a pro-active approach to external funders that ensures **at least six (£1m+) grant applications are submitted each year**, a high quality research infrastructure, well-trained staff and excellent post-award support.

Box 3: Key indicators for underpinning elements

Indicator	Target
Research income	Raise income to £7.5m by 2020, based on subject-specific targets
Early-career training	Maintain volume of Phd completions within 4 years
	All academic staff to be engaged in PhD supervision
Research support	At least six £1m+ grant applications submitted per year
Research integrity	All staff to have completed research ethics training by 2020

2.9 Research integrity

It is core to SOAS values, and to values within the sector as a whole, that our research should be carried out in an ethical manner that respects principles such as non-coercion, integrity and quality, independence and impartiality, avoiding harm, and confidentiality and anonymity. Whilst these principles are widely accepted across the School, we have in the past lacked detailed processes that ensure compliance, exposing the School to significant institutional risk. Our aim is to build such processes, including ensuring **all researchers complete ethics training by 2020**.

2.9 Summary

Each of the above strategic objectives and underpinning elements represents an area in which it should be possible to measure progress on the development of research excellence across the School. Section 3 below provides an initial assessment of progress in each of these areas, highlighting achievements over the period 2014-15 (i.e. since the 2014 REF submission) but also outlining areas in which improvements are required or actions need to be taken.

3. Progress towards research excellence: a review of 2014-15

This section reviews progress towards research excellence in each of the eight strategic areas identified in section 2. It is accepted that these areas are at present somewhat arbitrary and have not (yet) been endorsed as key areas of focus for research excellence across the School. Nonetheless, they align with some of the key elements of the Research Excellence Framework and other external measures of research quality, and provide a useful basis for an initial assessment. It is anticipated that a more robust assessment will be made at the end of 2016 / start of 2017 once core criteria and indicators are agreed.

Strategic objectives

3.1 Recognition of excellence

As the Research Excellence Framework is an exercise conducted once every six years, it is impossible to demonstrate actual improvement in this until 2020. However, over the past year, we have taken significant steps towards preparing for REF 2020, including:

- We have established a REF steering group, with all Departments represented, as well as sub-groups on outputs, environment, impact, data and research integrity. All of these groups have met and are active.
- We have appointed a new Research Excellence Manager, who is due to start work in May 2016;
- We have identified leads for all units of assessment, including Area Studies (to be led by a regional institute chair), Media & Cultural Studies (to be led jointly across the Faculties of Arts & Humanities and Languages and Cultures) and Modern Languages & Linguistics (to consist of two parts, one on linguistics, and one on world literature)

In addition, we are in the process of re-establishing the School's league table working group to focus not only on national league tables such as GUC and CUC, which are driven by REF and the Guardian, which does not include research at all; but also on QS and THE, which are driven by a research reputation survey, and citation rates for journals abstracted in Scopus. So far, this strand of work has included measures to identify and prioritise Scopus journals, encourage editors of non-Scopus journals to get them abstracted in Scopus, and encouragement of academic staff to use online repositories such as Research Gate and Academia.edu. Although not specifically related to these measures, our QS ranking rose to 275th in 2015-16, whilst we were 45th for Arts & Humanities and 215th for Social Sciences.

3.2 Regional engagement

Our approach to the field of area studies has been reviewed, and a new and more focused engagement is under development, led by our regional institutes. At present, a draft research strategy has been written, but the next key step is to take a decision about which staff will – in principle – be included under Area studies for research planning purposes, and which will be submitted in disciplines. It is intended to draft a tentative allocation of all staff to UoAs, and seek agreement of Academic Board in the summer term of 2016 for this to be used for planning purposes until the precise configuration of panels becomes clear.

In addition, a strategic partnerships working group has been established to align engagement with each of our regions across research, teaching and outreach. It is hoped to align a bottom-up process of formalizing links involving individual academics and departments with a strategic approach that promotes consistency and coherence.

3.3 Disciplinary approaches

Beyond Area studies, all units of assessment were asked to produce a new 5-year research strategy in 2015, and these have been updated and peer-reviewed within the School in October-November 2015 and then revised again for this review in January 2016. Although some of these strategies remain 'work-in-progress', two of the three units that lost significant amounts of QR income as a result of REF2014 (Anthropology and History) have produced strategies that reflect on the results of REF 2014 and produce clear forward visions. Drafts have also been completed for Modern languages & linguistics and Culture & media studies, two areas in which it is anticipated that significant groups of staff submitted in Area studies in 2014 would be submitted in 2020.
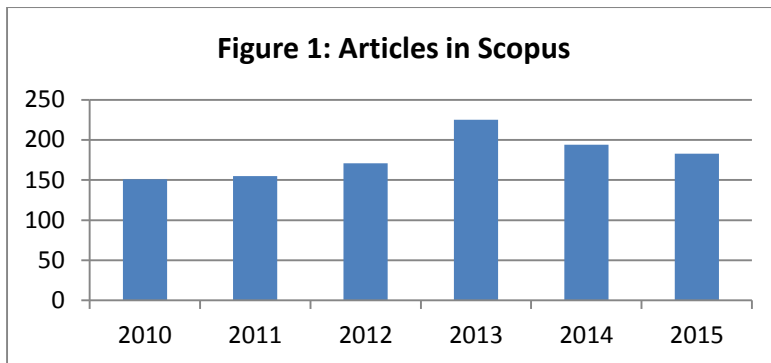
3.4 Impact on scholarship and learning

For each Unit of Assessment (and in FLC, for each Department), we have reviewed progress on research outputs in 2014 and 2015, as well as asking Departments to return templates about their engagement with key issues, including processes for monitoring the quantity and quality of publications, advice and mentoring on publication destinations and types of publication, and compliance with Open Access requirements. Departmental responses are provided in Annex 1.

By the end of 2015, the vast majority of staff in the School had deposited at least one research output on SOAS Research Online, although a total of 54 (or one in five of all academic staff) had not, although in some cases (e.g. Politics) this appears to be because SOAS Research Online has not been updated, rather than because there is a lack of material published.

UoA	Number of staff (approx.)	Staff with no outputs	% staff with no outputs
Management	30	1	3%
Law	34	10	29%
Politics	33	8	24%
Anthropology	20	3	15%
Development / Economics	53	8	15%
Area studies	15	4	27%
Languages & Linguistics	30	9	30%
History	18	4	22%
Religions	20	2	10%
Art History	15	2	13%
Music	8	1	13%
Culture & Media	15	2	13%

At present, it is difficult to be clear about precise progress towards targets for research outputs, because agreement has not yet been reached about an appropriate process to be used in each Unit of Assessment to measure quality, and external reviewers have not yet been appointed. However, it is clear that whilst in 2014 and 2015 we narrowly failed to achieve the target for volume of articles (Figure 1), the number in 2015 was 20% higher than in 2010 at a similar point in the REF cycle. With continued encouragement to target 'top' journals, reaching the target of 200 articles per year is eminently achievable. It should be noted that Research Associates can be included as individuals contributing to this target, so long as they use their SOAS affiliation.

Figure 1: Articles in Scopus

A bar chart titled "Figure 1: Articles in Scopus" showing the number of articles per year:
- 2010: ~150
- 2011: ~155
- 2012: ~170
- 2013: ~225
- 2014: ~195
- 2015: ~183

The y-axis ranges from 0 to 250 in increments of 50.

Meanwhile, one proxy for output quality is to count the number of monographs completed in those disciplines – notably Anthropology, History, Politics and Religions – where REF panels have indicated that these are important and where most or all staff members would be expected to have completed a monograph within a six-year period. Based on this measure, only seven monographs were completed in 2014 and 2015 amongst some 90 staff – an even distribution over the six year period would imply that around 20 monographs should have been completed at this stage within these four Departments. This is less promising, although these Departments have set out strategies to promote monograph delivery moving forward.

In terms of methodology for reviewing the quality of outputs moving forward, some departments have proposed using metrics (journal rankings, citations) allied to some form of internal review and sparing use of externals (Management, Economics, to some degree Development Studies) whilst others have proposed more complex internal review processes. These processes, together with arrangements for mentoring, inclusion of 'non-traditional' outputs (websites, exhibitions, scholarly editions) and Open Access will be the subject of further discussion by the Academic Outputs Working Group, with a target for mechanisms to be agreed for all Departments by May 2016.

As noted above, we will work on measurement of impacts of research on teaching and learning in the coming year.

3.5 Benefits for society

In relation to research impact, it is not yet possible to identify progress towards the production of new and 'outstanding' case studies. Nonetheless, the Impact Officer has met all departments and over 120 academics, and has identified 51 potential impact case studies. In turn, most units of assessment have identified a sufficient number of potential impact case studies in their plans. These do not yet align directly as the sharepoint-based filing system developed for recording impact is still in the process of roll-out – it is currently being used by 17 academics. It has not yet been possible to develop an impact strategy or identify case studies specifically in Area studies pending a decision on which staff will be included in this UoA.

Overall there are a number of promising areas of impact identified by Departments, backed up support to academic staff in developing 'pathways to impact' statements for their research, and significantly enhanced engagement with external users of research (including through a new series of 'impact lunches'). There have been six successful applications for the Impact Acceleration fund, with 3 more under development. A focus in the coming year needs to be on clear identification of the specific impacts being claimed in each area, through targeted sessions with each department; closer attention to impact deriving from large externally-funded research grants; and further development of systems for measuring and recording evidence.

UoA	Number of staff (approx.)	Number of impact case studies needed	Number of impact case studies identified
Management	30	4	6
Law	34	4	6
Politics	33	4	6
Anthropology	20	3	5
Development / Economics	53	6	5
Area studies	15	3	0
Languages & Linguistics	30	4	4
History	18	3	3
Religions	20	3	2
Art History	15	3	4
Music	8	2	11
Culture & Media	15	3	5
Total	291	42	57

Underpinning elements

3.6 Doubling research income

Total research income for the last financial year, reported to HESA, grew by 12% from £4.3m in 2013/14 to just under £4.8m in 2014/15, slightly above target. Income has grown for the third successive year and the upward trend in both research volume and overheads is encouraging, although it should be noted that the percentage of overheads has decreased slightly as volume has increased.

The largest volume of funding in 2014-15 came from Leverhulme Trust (£1.05m), with European Commission (£549k) and ESRC (£546k) next. In total, funding came from over 50 different funders. Whilst the portfolio of funders will be similar in 2016, the European Research Council will become more significant following the award of two ERC grants that started in 2014/15 (in Linguistics and Anthropology) with three more due to start in 2015/16 (in Religions, Area Studies and Languages), as will AHRC, with two large grants (in Linguistics and Religions). This also reflects a significant increase in research grant applications – a total of £38m in grants was applied for in 2015, or nearly three times the average total for 2011-13 of £13m. This led to £4.7m being secured in income in 2015, up nearly 40% compared to 2011-13..

There are some notes of caution. First, some Departments appear to lack a 'pipeline' of significant future grant applications, suggesting some concern that all will meet income targets that continue to rise in the future. It is also the case that the income currently secured represents activity from a relatively small percentage of the School's staff. This is an area that will be explored further in early 2016, including addressing concerns that the current RAM model creates perverse incentives for staff applying for some types of grant.

3.7 High quality early-career training

Data on PhD completions was still awaited at the time of compilation of this report. There are some concerns around a lower than expected intake of new PhD students in 2015-16 (perhaps reflecting the REF poor results and loss of AHRC funding).

However, evidence suggests we remain on track with PhD completions, meeting our target for 80% of FT students to complete within 4 years. The Doctoral school and a number of Departments have also been actively engaging with a bid led by UCL for a Doctoral Training

Partnership, including new thematic strands in Linguistics and Gender Studies, which should as a minimum protect existing scholarship provision. Discussions have also taken place over possible international training partnerships focused on Buddhist studies; and with institutions in Senegal, as part of broader effort to diversity scholarship income.

3.8 Proactive research support

During 2014 and 2015, significant efforts have been put into improving the quality of support to academic staff provided by the research office. This has included the introduction of universal access to Research Professional with a tailored profile for each academic; the hosting of visits by funders including British Academy, European Union and DFID; the hosting of impact lunches involving individuals and organisations that are significant potential 'users' of SOAS research; academic staff training focused on research income, publication strategies, REF, etc.; research coffee mornings and drop-in sessions and attendance at Department and Faculty meetings.

Internally within REO we have also revised responsibilities and created a dedicated post award function. This is to provide designated support for on-going research projects and ensure compliance with funder terms and conditions. This transition has been hindered by difficulties appointing a Post Award Officer: the position is currently re-advertised and is anticipated to be filled by spring. In addition, the change of chart of accounts within SOAS has also absorbed some resources and caused some delays in transitioning to the new structure.

Whilst work is required to encourage greater engagement with this improved support, feedback so far is positive and constructive. In particular, targeted support has enabled a total of 11 grants over £1m to be submitted in 2015, with four currently pending, although this reflects a level of applications to the European Research Council that cannot be easily sustained in 2016. The next step is implementation of a research information system which should not only significantly increase efficiency of application management but also provide essential management information both with regards to strategic opportunities as well as research performance. This system has been the subject of an external tender process, and tenders are currently being considered.

Finally, a major resource for SOAS research is its Library, which provides important special collections of importance across the School. The Library has recently undertaken a consultation exercise on its future, but it is not yet clear how the Library's strategy is to be aligned with the wider School research strategy. One way to achieve this would be to conduct an independent review of the Library in the coming year.

3.9 Research integrity

The research office has worked closely with a number of departments (including LIS, planning, portfolio management) to develop and implement new procedures and workflows including a new external grant application procedure, a new Open Access APC procedure, and a revised ethics policy and procedure. The latter includes the rolling out of new research ethics approval forms first to PhD students in 2014-15, and now to all academic staff in 2015-16. From early 2016, we are also rolling out an online- training programme covering all aspects of research integrity. This learning tool is available not only to academic staff but also all students and professional services staff.

However, this area remains a work in progress, and we continue to seek engagement with academic departments in ensuring that all research in the School is conducted in conditions of safety, and in accordance both with general principles of research ethics, but also specific codes of conduct in particular disciplines. Deteriorating conditions for researchers and for

academic freedom in some of our countries of focus – notably in the Middle East – are a particular cause for concern.

4. Actions

Vision and Strategy

- Approval of vision and strategy at Academic Board
- Incorporation of research vision and strategy into School's wider strategy
- Profiling of the School's research within the Centenary

Recognition of excellence:

- Continue to hold REF steering group meetings and working group
- Agree allocation of staff to Units of Assessment, notably Area studies, Media & Cultural studies; and Modern languages & linguistics (by May 2016)
- Convene League Tables Working Group and design strategy for improved QS and THE ranking

Regional engagement

- See above on allocation of staff to Area studies
- Develop partnership strategy by May 2016

Disciplinary approaches:

- Feedback to Departments on latest research and impact strategies by April 2016
- Next iteration of strategies complete by end 2017

Impact on scholarship:

- Departments to ensure 100% uploading of research outputs to SOAS research online
- Academic outputs working group to agree a process for peer review of outputs in each discipline by May 2016.
- Further promotion of Open Access rules and support for APCs in key areas
- Units of Assessment to begin review of outputs for report to Academic Board in Spring 2017
- Some Departments to develop strategy to promote monographs

Benefits for society

- Further development of monitoring system for research impact
- Continue to implement Impact Acceleration Fund
- Ensure research excellence plays a role in curriculum review

Benchmarked research income:

- Ensure research income planning fully integrated into Faculty planning round
- Ensure research input into review of RAM
- Continue targeted support for high value grants
- Roll out training for staff in research income application process.

High quality early-career training:

- Chase data on PhD completions for 2014 and 2015
- Develop approach to BGP3 (AHRC DTP, assumed with CHASE partnership)
- Develop one or more international doctoral training partnerships.

Proactive research support:

- Introduction of a Research Management System
- Consider external review of the Library

Research integrity:

- Continue roll-out of online training in research integrity, and consider options for future training