

# Annual Report for the Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers

## Universities and Research Institutes

Name of Institution	SOAS University of London
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Statement on how the organisation creates, maintains and embeds a research culture that upholds a positive and inclusive environment for researchers at all stages of their careers (max 500 words)

SOAS University of London benefits from being a small, specialist institution focused on the study of Africa, Asia, and the Middle East, in disciplines across the Humanities and Social Sciences. We also benefit from: a new SOAS Strategic Plan (2021-2026), with four pillars, two of which are research intensity (with a focus on researcher development) and institutional community (with a focus on fostering an enabling, inclusive environment, and equity and accountability); and a SOAS Research and Knowledge Exchange (RKE) Strategy (2021-2026), which sets out four objectives: 1) enhancing our research culture, 2) building and developing our capacity for research and knowledge exchange, 3) fostering ideas and building connections, and 4) increasing SOAS' visibility and influence. SOAS has long been a world-leader in decolonising research themes and methods, enshrined in 2017 through our Decolonising Vision and through the decolonial ethos and social justice goals of many of our externally funded and SOAS-funded research projects. This means that the research staff we attract to SOAS are extremely diverse and committed to inclusivity and equitable global research partnerships. Since 2021, SOAS has also had a Director for Equity and Accountability who works closely with the EDI team to ensure our environment is positive and supportive, and that institutional policies and practices relevant to researchers adhere to principles of transparency and inclusivity.

The SOAS Strategic Plan is being implemented through a new governance structure that has created a second tier of academic leadership through grouping SOAS' academic departments into three Colleges (since September 2022), thereby de-centralising aspects of operational support from senior management and seeking to enhance internal communications across departments. Each of these Colleges has a RKE committee with an ECR and PhD representative. Since 2022/2023 the RKE Directorate has established a dedicated Research Culture team which holds responsibility for ECR initiatives, reporting systems, and the monitoring of KPIs. In 2022 SOAS also implemented a new internal funding scheme to support research career development, including training workshops, coaching sessions, writing retreats, support with writing and editing, and support with IKE; many of the beneficiaries of this scheme have been ECRs on research contracts. This work has progressed hand-in-glove with the ongoing work of our Research Officers who support staff in specific departments in their applications for research grants, and through the creation, in 2023, of a SOAS-wide Funder Liaison Network to bring together researchers and managers of researchers at different career levels. In January 2023 a new SOAS-wide Research Culture Committee was also created (encompassing the Researcher Concordat Implementation Committee), initiating and overseeing the HReiR steering committee, the

launch of several new SOAS-wide research networks (focused on restitution, digital research, and practice-based research) and that include researchers of all career levels (including PhD researchers), with an emphasis on interdisciplinarity and sharing knowledge. HR at SOAS provides support and resources for researchers and their line managers through both in-person and online training. EDI principles, awareness of mental health and well-being, and counteracting unconscious bias are prioritised in such training.

**Provide a short summary of the institution’s strategic objectives and implementation plans for delivering each of the three pillars of the Concordat (environment and culture, employment, and professional development of researchers) for your key stakeholder groups together with your measures for evaluating progress and success (max 600 words)**

### **Environment and culture**

Our key objective is to foreground and empower researchers and their line managers, given our commitment to research intensity and equity in our new institution-wide strategies. Clearer communication channels have been developed through in-person and online meetings and events to ensure that everyone is aligned with regards to our obligations to the Concordat, and aware of the training and resources available at SOAS. Progress is being continuously evaluated through qualitative and quantitative reporting via our new SOAS and College governance committees, and in February 2024 we will run a SOAS-wide survey of our research environment and culture. The survey will assess the success of new initiatives, such as: our research mentoring framework (launching 2023/2024); access to Spectrum’s Employee Assistance Programme to support staff well-being (available since July 2023); wider take-up of the Epigeum research integrity course; and engagement with our SOAS-wide internal funding scheme, research networks and Funder Liaison Network. We will also regularly seek informal feedback from researchers and their line managers to ensure that we are responsive to their needs as vital stakeholders at SOAS. Wherever possible, we will undertake equality impact assessments on the data that we gather, to ensure our research culture is inclusive and equitable.

### **Employment**

A key objective is to ensure that academic and professional services staff (particularly in the HR department) are working closely together to honour our obligations to the Concordat. To create more effective communication channels in this respect, our Concordat team took the decision to convene bi-weekly meetings of our HReiR steering committee from mid-September 2023 to discuss and assess our progress, ensuring that our work is collaborative, consultative, and consistent. We are also triangulating our work with that of the EDI team and the Promotions Panel to improve our policies and practices not only in relation to recruitment, but also in terms of relocation (especially for international researchers from the ‘Global South’), retention, recognition and reward (since for research-only staff on fixed-term contracts it has historically been difficult to secure promotions). Line managers of researchers are actively sponsoring researchers in their career development and in helping them to secure excellent, rewarding employment

when their fixed-term research positions come to an end. We will share, publicise and promote best practice models of such work through following and celebrating the trajectories of our researchers and highlighting success stories, for example through our weekly SOAS news bulletin.

### **Professional Development of Researchers**

There are many opportunities for career development of researchers at SOAS, but they have not always been adequately joined-up and publicised. To meet these Concordat principles, we are launching an annual calendar of research culture activities, including a specific calendar of ECR events and opportunities, to help clarify for ECRs the options available for the 10 days of professional development to which they are entitled. In addition to live, in-person events, we are re-launching our online ECR platform to share all relevant information and resources, as well as a new filmed interview series on research leadership that the Research Culture Manager launched in 2022/2023. Acknowledging that not all ECRs want to stay in academia, in 2023/2024 we will work closely with the Careers team to invite speakers from different industries to share their experiences and practical advice with our researchers for career development in a diversity of fields. The success of these events will be monitored and analysed through feedback forms. ECRs are made aware of our internal funding to support seedcorn project development, grant-writing, writing retreats, and IKE work, and are actively encouraged to apply, and this is monitored through analysis of applications and awards.

### **Summary of actions taken, and evaluation of progress made, in the current reporting period to implement your plan to support the three pillars in respect of each of your key stakeholder groups [Institution; Academic Managers of Researchers (Deans, Heads of Schools/Departments/Pis); Researchers]**

#### **Environment and Culture (max 600 words)**

All staff at SOAS are made aware of the Concordat through the New Staff Newsletter and our Research and Development webpages. In 2023/2024 our College RKE convenors will attend Department meetings to ensure that all new research staff and their managers are aware of the Concordat and our obligations through it and at the start of the 2023/2024 academic year, we will hold a networking event for ECRs and their line managers. In 2022/2023, SOAS inaugurated a new Research Culture team and a Research Culture Committee which reviews research policies, practices, and initiatives to ensure they are inclusive and transparent. In 2023/2024, SOAS will roll out a new research mentoring framework (prioritising ECRs), and will join the London-wide B-MEntor scheme for racially minoritised researchers. Since 2021, SOAS has also offered Usawa post-doctoral fellowships to Black researchers to help to rectify the unequal pipeline into research careers in the UK.

All staff are encouraged to attend wellbeing-related activities and their managers are expected to undertake Mental Health Awareness training. To provide staff with resources to improve their wellbeing, SOAS partners with [Spectrum Life](#) to provide our new Employee Assistance Programme (EAP). The EAP, available to all employees and their families since July 2023, provides confidential 24/7 support by phone, WhatsApp, Live Chat or online. Staff also have access to a Wellbeing Digital Platform with a wide range of wellbeing programmes, podcasts and digital gym access. Wellbeing training courses from LinkedIn Learning (to which all staff have free access) are regularly promoted. HR policies are also in place to protect staff from discrimination, bullying and harassment, and a Stress Working Group has been established, incorporating HR and academic staff, to assess the impact of stress/workloads.

All SOAS staff must complete mandatory training courses on EDI, Unconscious Bias, and Research Integrity. The SOAS Research Ethics Policy is based upon and aligned with the Concordat and places a premium on maintaining the highest ethical standards in our research, fostering honesty, rigour, care and respect. The Epigeum research integrity course is mandatory for all academic staff, as well as postgraduate research students upon Upgrade to PhD. Staff seeking internal promotion are required to have successfully passed the course. Managers of researchers have in-person and online training available. Courses include “Handling Challenging Conversations with Care” and “Coaching Skills”. In 2022/2023, a new SOAS Managers’ Handbook was created. Research managers and researchers have opportunities at SOAS to contribute to policy development and create a more positive research culture through our new Funder Liaison Network, which brings together the RKE Directorate, researchers and their line managers to share best practice in relation to working with particular research funding organisations.

SOAS researchers benefit from regular meetings with their managers and from PRP (personal research plan) meetings with Department RKE convenors which require them to reflect on their achievements and set 5-year goals. All staff are also required to do annual staff development reviews with their managers. In March/April 2023, 30% of our ECRs were surveyed to assess their satisfaction with the support offered and to set research culture priorities for 2023/2024. The survey revealed that most ECRs have gained experience of project management, grant writing, and KE through our internal support scheme, as well as confidence in their career development. ECRs asked for more support with overcoming writing blocks and time management issues. In

	<p>response, we are creating an annual ECR calendar, including workshops, training sessions, seminars, and networking events, and strengthening communication channels through online group channels and mailing lists. A full-scale survey of SOAS' research environment and culture will be conducted in Spring 2024.</p>
<p><b>Employment (<i>max 600 words</i>)</b></p>	<p>At SOAS we are bold and decisive in our resolve to identify inequities and dedicate resources to resolving them. We have an institutional commitment to increasing the pipeline of Black researchers at SOAS, who are underrepresented, and to improve inclusion and progression of researchers across all protected characteristics. These objectives are met through the combined efforts of the RKE Directorate, Human Resources and academic departments, and include our EDI training of, and diversification of, recruitment panels to ensure fairness and prevent unconscious bias. Our success in this work is evidenced in that approximately 50% of our ECR research-only staff are women, and more than 50% are from BAME backgrounds. The proportion of Black ECR research-only staff has increased through our Usawa post-doctoral scheme, our investment in the UKRI Future Leaders Fellowship scheme for outstanding ECR researchers (SOAS currently hosts two such FLFs), as well as externally-funded projects (such as the ERC-funded African Screen Worlds project). Our successes are also evidenced through data on the career destinations of our post-doctoral research fellows after completion of their fixed-term contracts. We will undertake a complete analysis of their trajectories in 2023/2024, but we can already cite many examples of staff securing permanent academic positions not only at SOAS itself but also at other prestigious institutions in the UK and globally.</p> <p>SOAS has a robust <u>Recruitment and Selection Policy</u>. All staff sitting on recruitment panels are required to undertake recruitment training (which includes discussion around how unconscious and conscious bias can impact recruitment in negative ways). This Policy and the training ensure that there is an open, transparent, and documented process for all advertised roles. Inductions for researchers are enhanced through the <u>New Staff Newsletter</u>, which includes links to vital information, including an Induction check-list for researchers and their line managers. All new staff receive an induction buddy and mentor with whom they can meet regularly during their first year at SOAS. The Learning and Development team at SOAS are currently updating managers' training; recent initiatives include the launch of the Managers' Handbook and a range of project management training courses freely available to all staff through SOAS' subscription to LinkedIn</p>

	<p>Learning. Internal SOAS training is now delivered both live and asynchronously through Inkpath, the skills and career development platform, which allows staff to plan, record, and reflect on their training. In 2023/2024, the new academic structure at SOAS of the three Colleges (with the new Heads of Colleges and the new College RKE Convenors) will enhance monitoring of researchers' line managers, ensuring that they are aware of their responsibilities and duties of care to their researchers, and aware of available resources. Colleges will be required to submit progress reports to our new Research Culture Committee.</p> <p>SOAS' Academic Promotions, Reward and Recognition procedures were revised and re-launched in 2023. These reviews have led to more clarity on criteria. Since 2022, the Promotions Panel is given unconscious bias training before the process begins and is surveyed after the promotions exercise to gather their feedback on how it can be improved for the following year. In 2023/2024 the Research Culture Committee will work with HR and the Promotions Panel to provide greater clarity on the recognition and reward routes available to researchers on fixed-term contracts.</p> <p>Researchers and their managers have multiple forums through which they are informed about and consulted on research-related developments within SOAS. These include all-staff briefings, the monthly Directors' Group Drop-Ins for staff, the Academic Assembly, and Department meetings. In 2023/2024 our new Funder Liaison Network will bring together researchers and line managers working with specific funders to share best practice.</p>
<p><b>Professional development (max 600 words)</b></p>	<p>SOAS' goal is to create an innovative environment for researcher development, improving every stage of the doctoral and ECR journey, from training and supervision to enhancing collaborative working, funding and support. We have also been consciously and conscientiously working to better recognise and support our ECR staff through, for example, including them in Department and College Away Days, and foregrounding and celebrating their work at these events. For the first time in 2022/2023, several SOAS Departments have also allocated department research allowances to externally funded post-doctoral researchers, including for Open Access and other publishing-related fees.</p> <p>All research-only ECRs at SOAS are given 10 days of professional/career development annually. In 2023/2024 this entitlement will be more widely publicised by our new College RKE convenors and the Research Culture team. There is a significant range of training available at SOAS, and there is a dedicated site with resources for PhDs and ECRs, which includes support with</p>

career planning and management, job hunting, networking, international academic careers, funding, managing interviews and developing teaching experience (which can be difficult for those moving from research-only positions into teaching and research positions). SOAS also fully funds ECRs who want to apply for membership of the Higher Education Academy's teaching fellowships to help them transition into permanent academic positions and offers a great deal of support through our internal scheme. SOAS offers staff both internal and external job shadowing opportunities (externally through the London-wide Outsidelnsight scheme). In 2022/2023, the Research Culture team created several filmed interviews on research leadership with outstanding and inclusive senior researchers at SOAS, and these are being shared through our ECR Teams site, along with other useful resources. In 2023/2024, in addition to building on these resources, the Research Culture team plans to collaborate with the Careers Service to offer careers information and networking events for ECRs. As part of our new Funder Liaison Network, we will also be inviting specific funders to SOAS to share opportunities and insights into the research funding landscape with ECRs. ECRs at SOAS will also be encouraged to engage with the new London hub of the British Academy's ECR network, launching in 2023/2024.

SOAS is proud to have an Associate Director for Equity and Accountability (since 2021), supported by an EDI team, which is implementing our Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy (2021-2025). We recognise the intersectional racial disparities in our society and our priorities reflect these concerns. SOAS' commitment to gender equality in professional development is demonstrated by our membership of the Athena SWAN Charter (we successfully renewed our Bronze Award in April 2019 and are applying for a renewal), which seeks to advance the careers of women and promote gender equity more widely in HE; those who identify as women at SOAS (and especially ECRs) are strongly encouraged to take part in the Aurora Women's Leadership Development programme. SOAS also encourages research managers to engage in leadership training and has funded staff to undertake the Aurora Senior Women's Leadership Development programme. SOAS has also committed to applying for the Race Equality Charter (REC) during this strategy period; this is allowing us to reflect on the institutional barriers standing in the way of racially minoritised staff and students, thereby ensuring that our ECRs have equal opportunities in professional/career development.



	<p>Recruiters and managers of researchers at SOAS are trained in EDI principles and on unconscious bias to ensure that we treat all researchers with the utmost fairness and respect while also being aware of the barriers that marginalised researchers face, as reported in the Oxford/Wellcome Trust 2022 report on Equity and Inclusivity in Research Funding.</p>
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**Comment on any lessons learned from the activities undertaken over this period and any modifications you propose to make to your action plan and measures of success as a result. (max 500 words)**

While the new governance structure at SOAS has enhanced our ability to communicate more effectively about and monitor our Concordat and HReiR work, the intense leadership changes and high staff turn-over in 2022/2023 at SOAS has led to some slowing down of our activities and issues with the hand-over of roles. One of the key modifications to our action plan in 2023/2024 is thus to better align our processes and practices, and the implementation of our policies, across all three Colleges to ensure parity and equity for researchers and their line managers, thereby creating a more integrated, fair, and transparent research culture and environment. As part of this alignment, we will complement our formal RKE meetings with regular informal meetings to make sure that the research community is informed of, consulted on, and fully involved in, the broader direction of travel across SOAS. We have realised that we need to engage people at the very start of the academic year to communicate more clearly about expectations and resources, and to share calendars of research culture activities for the upcoming year so that researchers and their managers have this information well in advance. Since research mentoring has previously operated in an ad hoc way in different academic departments, from 2023/2024 we are formalising and streamlining this process across SOAS, and will monitor its success through feedback forms completed by mentors and mentees. Our plan to shift at least some of our research overheads from Departments to the RKE Directorate will also have the benefit of allowing us to ensure that there is more transparency and equity in terms of how we conduct internal and external recruitment of ECRs for prestigious research fellowships, such as the Future Leaders Fellowship programme (which is an excellent way for us to fulfil our commitments to ensuring permanent employment for outstanding ECRs) as well as our internal Usawa post-doctoral fellowships for Black researchers. Part of this work will involve not only trying to improve our track record, but also recognising, celebrating, and sharing best practices at SOAS. For example, in our 2022 Staff Survey, a key success was that our staff feel line managers treat them fairly, and there is a strong culture at SOAS in terms of managers allowing flexibility with working hours, which has a positive impact on researchers with caring duties. Another success in 2022/2023 is that several of our fixed-term post-doctoral fellows, and especially those of Black and Minority Ethnic backgrounds, secured prestigious permanent jobs at the end of their posts (for example, at SOAS, KCL, Edinburgh University, and the Indonesian International Islamic University). We intend to highlight these successes and share case studies to inspire and promote more of this positive behaviour. We also plan to better

publicise and foreground our well-being work through departmental well-being champions who will share information and report back to the HReiR steering committee.

**Outline your key objectives in delivering your plan in the coming reporting period  
(max 500 words)**

Our most important objective is to build on the momentum established over the past year with our new governance structures to shift our ECRs from the margins to the heart of SOAS' research community. We want to increase our support for ECRs throughout their journey, for example through: creating more inclusive relocation policies that enable international researchers to join us more easily; providing a warmer welcome and clearer induction on arrival at SOAS (highlighting our well-being resources); making ECRs' work far more visible at research away days, in public seminar series, and through online platforms, such as the SOAS weekly news bulletin; enhancing effective mentoring of ECRs by more senior researchers through our new Research Mentoring Framework; increasing uptake of training and resources offered by the Research Culture team (such as our ECR annual workshop series, and internal funding schemes for RKE), and offered by the Learning and Development team; and ensuring that we support our ECRs in establishing excellent, stable, rewarding careers, in research and beyond, both within SOAS and elsewhere around the world.

Increasing our support for ECRs also means increasing our support for their line managers through: enhancing our communication about the training and resources available to them; increasing their awareness of our obligations to researchers under the Concordat, such as the 10 days to undertake professional development activities; and creating communities and networks through which best practice can be shared, such as through our Funder Liaison Network, which will be rolled out in 2023/2024. Drawing on the benefits of our College structure, as well as our new SOAS-wide Research Culture Committee and Research Culture team, we will seek to streamline our processes to avoid repetition and ensure greater clarity of communication and greater parity for ECRs across the university. We will work closely with both academic and professional services teams to ensure that our support for researchers is fully aligned with SOAS' EDI strategy, and that we actively respond to the needs of the most marginalised researchers, understanding the barriers and constraints that they face (in line with the 2022 Oxford/Wellcome Trust Equity and Inclusivity in Research Funding report). HR will conduct EIAs on our data to ensure we are meeting our institutional scorecard priorities of increasing Black ECR staff, increasing Black staff on permanent contracts, reducing our gender and ethnicity pay gap, and honouring our commitment to decasualisation.

Ultimately, we will seek to create a responsive and accountable research culture in which we listen to, and act on, feedback from researchers and their line managers, for example through the SOAS-wide survey on our research culture and environment that we will undertake in February 2024, as well as through regular informal and formal in-person and online meetings. Our objective in this iterative work of ongoing improvement will be to

make researchers and their line managers feel valued as key stakeholders in the work and success of the institution, and to ensure that we are not making assumptions about what ECRs' professional and career development needs are.

**Please provide a brief statement describing your institution's approval process of this report prior to sign off by the governing body (*max 200 words*)**

This report was sent to the Directors Group on the 4<sup>th</sup> of September and to the Executive Board on the 18<sup>th</sup> of September for discussion. The report was sent to the Board of Trustees on the 5<sup>th</sup> of October for approval.



Signature on behalf of governing body:

Professor Laura Hammond  
Pro-Director of Research and Knowledge Exchange  
SOAS University of London Board of Trustees Member

Contact for queries: Prof. Lindiwe Dovey (ld18@soas.ac.uk), RKE Convenor for Culture and Tatiana Lima Faria (tf17@soas.ac.uk), Research Culture Manager.

This annual report will be analysed by Universities UK, secretariat for the Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers, to identify good practices, themes for development and information to improve national research culture policy and practice.

If you have any questions, or suggestions on how the reporting process could be improved, please contact the secretariat at [CDRsecretariat@universitiesuk.ac.uk](mailto:CDRsecretariat@universitiesuk.ac.uk)

[www.researcherdevelopmentconcordat.ac.uk](http://www.researcherdevelopmentconcordat.ac.uk)