



Union Forum Minutes

Date: 2nd May 2023

Time: 5pm - 7pm

Location: JCR

In attendance:

Gioia Scazza (GS)

Chair of Influencing SOAS, Co-President
Democracy and Education

Sushant Singh (SS)

Chair of SU Campaigns, Co-President Welfare
and Campaigns

Yara Derbas (YD)

Co-President Equality and Liberation

Stella Rose Hall Dixon (SRHD)

Harshul Singh (HS)

Alfie Bridges Smith (ABS)

Veera Lakshmi Ramayah (VLR)

Margot Chesne (MC)

Bhoopendra Kumar Ahirwar (BKA)

Charlotte Morris-Davis (CMD)

Student Engagement Manager/Secretary

Various other members of the SU (meeting open to all members)

Item No	Item
1	Welcome and Introductions
	1.1. GS welcomed everyone to the meeting.
	1.2. GS presented the SOAS SU Safe Space policy and provides information about how the forums will function.
2	Minutes of the Previous Meeting
	2.1. Minutes of the previous meeting approved .
Influencing SOAS	

3	Discount on Bring Your Own bowl at on-campus catering & cut down waste
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3.1. YD presents the idea on behalf of the idea proposer.

3.2. Meeting participants discuss the idea, including discount amount, other sustainable options including composting and reusable cutlery.

3.3. Consensus reached across meeting participants that the following amendment should be accepted 'Encourage compost bins, utensils and work in partnership with the environmental societies.

3.4. MC proposes a new solution advocating for a specific '20% discount', whilst retaining all other wording in the original solution, including the first amendment.

3.5. The final wording of each solution is as follows:

Solution One: Discount on Bring Your Own bowl at on-campus catering & cut down waste

1. I want to advocate for this idea of BYOB (bring your own bowl) at SOAS food stall.
2. I think not only should they have posters around the catering area advocating for bringing your own container and cutlery.
3. Offering discount for it will be a very effective way to encourage it.
4. I feel we also need a food waste bin in the lower ground floor of Paul Webley Wing, since food waste is sometime evitable (say, for example, when the chicken thigh comes with bones).
5. Encourage compost bins, utensils and work in partnership with the environmental societies

Solution Two: Discount on Bring Your Own bowl at on-campus catering & cut down waste

1. I want to advocate for this idea of BYOB (bring your own bowl) at SOAS food stall.
2. I think not only should they have posters around the catering area advocating for bringing your own container and cutlery.
3. Advocate for a 20% discount for it will be a very effective way to encourage it.
4. I feel we also need a food waste bin in the lower ground floor of Paul Webley Wing, since food waste is sometime evitable (say, for example, when the chicken thigh comes with bones).
5. Encourage compost bins, utensils and work in partnership with the environmental societies

4	Support potential UCU marking and assessment boycott
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4.1. ABS presents the idea on behalf of the idea proposer.

4.2. Meeting participants discuss the idea including the 100% pay deductions, despite the Marking and Assessment Boycott (MAB) not including strike action and the importance of showing solidarity with those undertaking the MAB and sharing information with students.

4.3. ABS proposes the amendment 'and being unwavering in their support for the MAB.' Meeting participants reach consensus to accept the amendment.

4.4. MC proposes the amendment 'The Student Union should defend students from any retaliation from management.'. Meeting participants reach consensus to accept the amendment.

4.5. YD proposes the amendment 'in conjunction with UCU members'. Meeting participants reach consensus to accept the amendment.

4.6. MC, ABS and GS propose the amendment 'and encourage student/staff dialogue. This should be consistent throughout the year.'. Meeting participants reach consensus to accept the amendment.

4.7. MC and YD propose the amendment 'The Student Union should specifically hold events informing International Students about the MAB, raising awareness and discussing their concerns such as fees and visa requirements.'. Meeting participants reach consensus to accept the amendment.

4.8. VLR proposes the amendment 'The Student Union should play a role in coordinating a response to ensure that there is a central place for information and that there is place for different groups, departments and Student Reps to come together.'. Meeting participants reach consensus to accept the amendment.

4.9. The final wording of each solution is as follows:

Solution One:

1. Carrying out a successful MAB will require solidarity and coordination across the university community.
2. The student union can play an important role here - informing students about the reasons for it, reassuring students about the consequences and being unwavering in their support for the MAB.
3. The Student Union should defend students from any retaliation from management.
4. Fundamentally, university workers must know that we back them 100%. We should organise more forums to discuss strategies in conjunction with UCU members in the dispute, social events to build community, protests to pressure management, spread the word amongst any students who are less informed and encourage student/staff dialogue. This should be consistent throughout the year.
5. We should also take inspiration from the growing number of workers taking strike action in different sections, particularly other education unions - we should invite representatives to campus events to share experience and build common strategies.
6. The Student Union should specifically hold events informing International Students about the MAB, raising awareness and discussing their concerns such as fees and visa requirements.
7. The Student Union should play a role in coordinating a response to ensure that there is a central place for information and that there is place for different groups, departments and Student Reps to come together.

5	Start an official SU campaign to reform Mitigating Circumstances
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5.1. SRHD presents the idea

5.2. Meeting participants discuss the idea including how this policy impacts disabled students and lack of easily accessible information about the mitigating circumstances policy.

5.3. MC proposes the amendment 'The SU should facilitate a working group with relevant stakeholders, disabled students societies, students with SIPs and other disabled students to discuss the relaxing of requirements, propose something specific around policies and any other additional content which is

created to make the process more accessible to ensure that any decision includes those most affected by it.’ Meeting participants reach consensus to accept the amendment.

5.4. SRHD proposes the amendment ‘This should include making the content more accessible and the creation of other supplementary information to make the process more easy to navigate’. Meeting participants reach consensus to accept the amendment.

5.5. VLR and YD propose the amendment ‘SOAS should proactively promote Mitigating Circumstances, ensuring that every student is aware of the policy. This should include being promoted within in Freshers Week (events/communication), an email to all students who have declared a disability, via physical communication and within more SOAS and SU webpages.’. Meeting participants reach consensus to accept the amendment.

5.6. VLR proposes the amendment ‘The deadlines for applying for Mitigating Circumstances and Study Inclusion Plans (SIP) should be easy to access on the SOAS website as well as opportunities for late submissions.’. Meeting participants reach consensus to accept the amendment.

5.7. VLR proposes the amendment ‘The University should increase capacity of the teams who process Mitigating Circumstances and Appeals.’. Meeting participants reach consensus to accept the amendment.

5.8. VLR proposes the amendment ‘The SU should provide specific information to international students about the available support that is available to them taking into consideration Visa requirements via Mitigating Circumstances and SIPs. The International Students Officer should support this work.’. Meeting participants reach consensus to accept the amendment.

5.9. The final wording of each solution is as follows:

Solution One: Start an official SU campaign to reform Mitigating Circumstances

1. We call for the SU to create an official campaign to reform the Mitigating Circumstances policy.
2. This reform should aim to abolish or significantly relax the requirements for providing evidence, allowing a wider range of acceptable reasons to be granted Mitigating Circumstances, significantly extend the periods for submitting evidence and for extensions, and reform the Mit Circs team to focus on compassion and student wellbeing over arbitrary application of procedures.
3. The SU should facilitate a working group with relevant stakeholders, disabled students societies, students with SIPs and other disabled students to discuss the relaxing of requirements, propose something specific around policies and any other additional content which is created to make the process more accessible to ensure that any decision includes those most affected by it.
4. Policies should be rewritten to be easier to read without having to cross-reference several documents and should be easy to find on the SOAS website. This should include making the content more accessible and the creation of other supplementary information to make the process more easy to navigate.
5. SOAS should proactively promote Mitigating Circumstances, ensuring that every student is aware of the policy. This should include being promoted within in Freshers Week (events/communication), an email to all students who have declared a disability, via physical communication and within more SOAS and SU webpages.
6. The deadlines for applying for Mitigating Circumstances and Study Inclusion Plans (SIP) should be easy to access on the SOAS website as well as opportunities for late submissions.
7. The University should increase capacity of the teams who process Mitigating Circumstances and Appeals.
8. The SU should provide specific information to international students about the available support that is available to them taking into consideration Visa requirements via Mitigating Circumstances and SIPs. The International Students Officer should support this work.

SU Campaigns

6 Caste Campaign at SOAS - A Step towards Inclusivity and Social Justice

6.1. HS present the idea.

6.2. Meeting participants discuss the idea including how caste based discrimination appears at SOAS and the need for institutional recognition of this through policies and creating space to discuss caste based discrimination.

6.3. BKA proposes the amendment 'The University to include Caste based discrimination within SOAS Policies, including through the creation of an Anti-Caste based discrimination policy.'. Meeting participants reach consensus to accept the amendment.

6.4. VLR proposes the amendment 'All relevant cultural and religious societies should be actively involved in this campaign.'. Meeting participants reach consensus to accept the amendment.

6.5. BKA proposes the amendment 'Include education about Caste in sensitisation training and within Freshers Week communication.'. Meeting participants reach consensus to accept the amendment.

6.6. ABS and VLR propose the amendment 'The relevant university's undergraduate programmes should include increased information on Caste and the way it manifest.'. Meeting participants reach consensus to accept the amendment.

6.7. VLR proposes the amendment 'Staff members/lecturers/tutors who are involved in programmes that are teaching subjects related to South Asia and staff members involved in the department must undertake specific and bespoke training around Caste based discrimination.'. Meeting participants reach consensus to accept the amendment.

6.8. The final wording of each solution is as follows:

Solution One: Caste Campaign at SOAS - A Step towards Inclusivity and Social Justice

1. Leading Caste Campaign.
2. Enabling more active involvement of students from marginalised caste communities. in realising deeply entrenched caste-based issues at SOAS.
3. Laying out provisions for administrative redressal of caste as a protective category
4. The University to include Caste based discrimination within SOAS Policies, including through the creation of an Anti-Caste based discrimination policy.
5. Creating a greater consciousness of caste-based discrimination.
6. Enabling caste-sensitisation sessions at SOAS
7. All relevant cultural and religious societies should be actively involved in this campaign.
8. Include education about Caste in sensitisation training and within Freshers Week communication.
9. The relevant university's undergraduate programmes should include increased information on Caste and the way it manifests.
10. Staff members/lecturers/tutors who are involved in programmes that are teaching subjects related to South Asia and staff members involved in the department must undertake specific and bespoke training around Caste based discrimination.