

<b>Institution: SOAS, University of London</b>
<b>Unit of Assessment: Theology and Religious Studies</b>
<p><b>1. Unit context and structure, research and impact strategy</b></p> <p><b>1.1 Unit context</b></p> <p>The study of religions at SOAS is unique in several regards. In contrast to 'Theology and Religion' departments at many other UK universities that focus on Christianity and use other religions as its background and supplement, our UoA conducts research in many different religious traditions and approaches them from a non-confessional and post-colonial perspective (see also IES§2). Avoiding a Eurocentric perspective, the diverse religions of Asia, Africa and the Middle East are examined in their own right on the basis of primary sources and through an analysis of the beliefs, rituals and practices of the practitioners and institutions within these traditions.</p> <p>The UoA has a <b>global and interdisciplinary approach</b> that informs everything we do (see §1.4; IES§2.2). Religion is seen as only one aspect of culture and has to be studied in context. It functions within specific historical, political, geographic, and socio-economic circumstances. Study of Religions at SOAS is therefore interdisciplinary, approaching religions from a variety of methodological perspectives including philology, historical criticism, social-anthropological and gender-studies approaches. While we pay special attention to religions that originated and are present in Asia, Africa, and the Middle East, we also take account of their global contexts and developments.</p> <p>The UoA's 19.25 FTE research-active members, including fixed-contract academics and postdoctoral researchers, cover religions that originated in the Near and Middle East such as Zoroastrianism, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam; Asian religions such as Jainism, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Japanese religions; and African religions. The combination of more theoretical approaches with individual staff members' expertise in specific religious traditions allows us to study the texts in depth, to conduct comparative analyses, and to cross-fertilise each other's research.</p> <p>Since we research religions in a global context, we have established and maintain network connections to other scholars in our own and related disciplines. Members of the UoA organise and participate in UK and global conferences, chair and collaborate with international research projects, and serve as referees and evaluators for funding organisations and publishers. SOAS's participation in the Open Society University Network (OSUN), announced by George Soros at Davos in January 2020, will further expand and strengthen our research collaborations.</p> <p>In the current REF cycle the total <b>research income</b> for Theology and Religious Studies is <b>£6.28 million</b>, which is one of the highest within SOAS (§3.1). In the latest QS World University Rankings Theology and Religious Studies at SOAS were ranked within the top 50 worldwide.</p> <p><b>1.2 Structure</b></p> <p>Most members of this UoA belong to the School of History, Religions and Philosophies (HRP). As part of the SOAS restructuring process and the abandonment of faculties, Islamic Studies colleagues from the former Near and Middle Eastern Studies Department (in the former Faculty of Languages and Cultures) became part of HRP (Shihadeh and Wilkinson), whereas others who remained within the School of Languages, Cultures, and Linguistics (LCL) were added to the UoA for REF purposes (Abdel-Haleem and Shah). Strong disciplinary links endure across departmental lines within the UoA.</p> <p>HRP hosts the newly established Shapoorji Pallonji Institute of Zoroastrian Studies and four research centres (the Centre of Buddhist Studies, Centre of Jaina Studies, Centre for the Study of Japanese Religions, Centre of World Christianity). Since LCL has a large programme in Arabic and Islamic studies and hosts the Centre for Islamic Studies, researchers from both</p>

schools contribute to the study of Islam at SOAS. Similarly, research on Hebrew and contemporary Israel is conducted in LCL, which hosts the Centre for Jewish Studies (CJS).

Members of the UoA participate in centres located elsewhere (e.g., Centre for Gender Studies; Food Studies Centre; Centre for Migration and Diaspora Studies). The centres offer a wide variety of outreach activities such as public lectures, seminars, workshops and conferences. They address British and global challenges such as the preservation of minority traditions and the prevention of religious extremism and radicalisation from a variety of perspectives (§4.1).

The UoA provides the **widest research cluster in Asian religions within the UK**. More than 50% of the entire UoA conducted research in Asian religions in various geographical areas (India, China, Japan, Tibet etc.) from medieval to modern times. This research focused on minority religions such as Jainism (Flügel) and Sikhism (Singh and Kim) and on the larger traditions of Buddhism (Pagel and Tournier), Hinduism (Proferes) and Chinese (Palumbo) and Japanese religions (Dolce and Padoan).

### 1.3 Research Strategy: 2014-20 and beyond

#### 1.3.1 Implementing our strategic goals in the current cycle

Our main strategic goals expressed in the REF 2014 Environment Statement were (1) to increase our research income, (2) 'to enhance collaboration, both within the discipline and across disciplines, at SOAS and beyond', and (3) 'to further the many individual research projects of departmental staff'. All three goals have been achieved.

##### (1) Securing research grants and endowed posts

In response to our first goal, to increase research income, we are very proud of having secured more than **£6.5 million in research awards** since 2013-14 (§3.1). These grants enabled members of the UoA to carry out research in the sources and rituals of minority religions such as Zoroastrianism, Jainism, and Sikhism that are uniquely represented at SOAS. They also supported research in Islam, especially in response to current challenges such as the UK government's Prevent Strategy and freedom of speech on campus (Scott-Baumann) and Islamic radicalisation (Wilkinson). A third research focus were the traditions of Yoga and meditation (Mallinson) that coalesced with research in other areas of Buddhism, Hinduism, and Jainism.

The UoA also has an outstanding record of fundraising for endowed posts, having succeeded in three new posts (two in Buddhism, one in Zoroastrianism). Since the 2014 REF submission, the UoA was able to increase the endowment of a Chair in Zoroastrianism, which is now firmly established with £3.2 million. SOAS's position as the **centre for the study of Zoroastrianism in the UK** was further corroborated when in 2017 the Shapoorji Pallonji Institute of Zoroastrian Studies was established at SOAS with an endowment of £5 million to fund a lectureship in Zoroastrianism, doctoral and post-doctoral scholarships, and a variety of outreach activities such as exhibitions. Furthermore, the UoA has consolidated its leading position in Buddhist Studies through the endowment of a further £600,000 to add to the existing **Numata endowment** which currently stands at approximately £1.4 million.

##### (2) Enhancing research collaboration

Since Study of Religions is an **interdisciplinary** area of study, many constructive collaborations developed within the UoA. Synergies in research areas and approaches provided multiple options for cross-fertilisation. The following can serve as examples:

Within the UoA several colleagues engage in **Digital Humanities projects**. The goal of Pagel's project was the creation of a digital, open-access diachronic lexicon of the Tibetan verb, based on a corpus of Tibetan texts. The lexicon with its tools is intended to strengthen the presence of Tibetan on the internet and to increase access to English language resources for Tibetan-speakers in China. Hintze's project on the multimedia Yasna (MUYI) has created an open access documentary film on the Yasna ritual in India and is transcribing and editing Yasna textual sources for an open-access digital database. Modern digital technologies such as the

XML format are applied to Zoroastrian manuscript studies. The projects are international collaborations that include computer specialists and filmmakers.

Another research cluster within the UoA focuses on **religions of the early Near and Middle East**. The members of the UoA consider the historical and philological study of pre-modern Zoroastrian, Jewish, Christian, and Islamic traditions an essential prerequisite for the proper understanding of contemporary conflicts in the region. Hintze investigated the impact of Zoroastrian beliefs on Judaism and Christianity. Hezser did research on ancient rabbinic Judaism within the context of Graeco-Roman and Christian societies. Hunter investigated Eastern Christianity in Syria and Mesopotamia. Abdel Haleem's research focused on the early Quranic tradition. Palumbo's studies of early Chinese culture overlap with these areas and indicate that late antique and early medieval societies and cultures should be studied in a **wider global context** than is usually done.

### (3) Furthering individual research projects within the principal research areas

Especially noteworthy here is the conclusion of the second stage (2012-15) of Hunter's and Sims-Williams' collaborative AHRC-funded research project on the **Christian library from Turfan**. The project has catalogued some 900 manuscripts in Syriac, Christian Soghdian and Christian Old Turkic, as well as New Persian that were found in the opening decade of the twentieth century at a monastery site near Bulayiq, Turfan. The texts, dating from the early medieval period (9<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> centuries), encompass liturgical texts, Bible readings, hymns and psalters, as well as ascetical texts including translations from Evagrius Ponticus, the Syrian and Egyptian desert fathers and East Syrian writers. In addition to the catalogue, Hunter and Sims-Williams have published critical editions of some of the texts. The project has also hosted annual workshops and lectures.

The **Multimedia Yasna (MUYA) project**, funded by the ERC with an Advanced Investigator Grant (2016-21, PI: Hintze) combines models and methodologies from digital humanities, philology and linguistics. The project produced a subtitled, interactive film of the Zoroastrian Yasna ritual, an online platform of transcribed manuscripts and editorial tools together with print editions, translations, and commentaries of the Avestan Yasna. Information about the Yasna, which was formerly restricted to students of Iranian philology and practising Zoroastrians, will now become accessible to worldwide audiences.

Two research projects addressed important issues concerning contemporary Islam in Britain. Wilkinson has conducted an interdisciplinary project including **criminological-theological research** to generate the most detailed and extensive set of data on conversion to Islam in British and continental European prisons. The project examined the effects of conversion to Islam on prison life and on prisoners' rehabilitation, including the effects of prison chaplaincy and religious occasions in prison. Driven by this data, the project will design a practical intervention to improve prison outcomes for inmates who convert to Islam. Scott-Baumann has conducted a project on 'Re/presenting Islam on Campus' that relates to the British government's anti-extremism programme 'Prevent'. The project has underlined the importance of free speech on campus and the importance of strengthening interfaith work, whereas the Prevent programme's targeting of Muslims was shown to be counterproductive.

The **Hatha Yoga project** (Mallinson and Singleton, in collaboration with other scholars at SOAS and in India), which was funded by the ERC and ran from 2015-20, charted the history of physical yoga practice by means of philology—the study of texts on yoga—and ethnography—fieldwork among practitioners of yoga. The project's primary outputs are critical editions and annotated translations of ten Sanskrit texts on Hatha Yoga, four monographs, and a range of journal articles, book chapters and encyclopaedia entries. In 2016 a workshop for twenty scholars working on critical editions of Sanskrit texts on yoga was held at SOAS and All Souls, Oxford. An online panel discussion with the members of the team was held in 2020 and joined by 300 people.

**1.3.2 Future strategic plans**

We aim at producing world-leading research, both collaboratively and individually, across our subject areas, and to support this research through external funding. We shall continue to address contemporary global challenges and to involve stakeholders in our research projects, while ensuring that in-depth research in pre-modern religious traditions and textual sources continues.

**Research in the textual traditions of non-Western and non-Christian cultures**

Several members of the UoA conduct fundamental research in the textual traditions of cultures and religions of the Near Middle East, Africa, and Asia. Understanding non-western religious traditions by focusing on their own textual and material sources and in the context of the historical, socio-economic, political, and cultural conditions in which they developed enables us to avoid common Christocentric approaches to non-Christian religions and to decolonise research. For example, following up on her existing project on the Multimedia Yasna, Hintze has secured an ERC MUYA-IIIF Proof of Concept (2020-2)2. This will allow her to continue her work on the Yasna tradition. Hezser will investigate the literary development of the classical rabbinic compilations (the Mishnah and Talmud) in the context of late antique scholasticism and encyclopedism. Continuing his research in Yoga texts, Mallinson plans to create a critical edition of the *Haṭhāpradīpikā* and to analyse the *Devīpurāṇa*, one of the most important Sanskrit goddess worship texts.

**Strengthening the social relevance of our research**

Many aspects of our research are of great significant for ongoing political, social, and educational discussions in the UK. We plan to continue to make our research relevant for the society we live in and to provide solutions to contemporary challenges. For example, Scott-Baumann will build on her Freedom of Speech on Campus project by investigating everyday practices that may help to avoid racial and religious stereotyping. She will also conduct a project that focuses on the knowledge production of Muslim women in the UK and Germany.

**Engaging with global challenges**

Currently, the Covid-19 crisis is the main global challenge which threatens the health of people worldwide. Yet the maintenance of health and prevention of illness has been a major concern in earlier times as well. Based on a SOAS seedcorn grant, Hezser started a project on 'Jews and Health: Tradition, History, and Practice', with an international conference in November 2019 and is now working on a collaborative volume that investigates health as a Jewish value from ancient to modern times. The project has also led to an evening lecture series organised through the Centre for Jewish Studies in 2020-21. Another global challenge is the climate crisis. With colleagues from the Faculty of Theology of the University of Oslo, Hezser is organising a series of online workshops on 'Nature and Ecology in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam'.

**Increasing global academic collaboration**

All UoA members collaborate with colleagues at other universities worldwide, in fields such as Archaeology, Art History, Sociology, and Gender Studies. For example, together with colleagues at the University of California and Boğaziçi University in Istanbul, Shihadeh is creating a research project entitled, 'From Historiography to Philosophical Engagement: Towards a Thematic Investigation of Islamic Philosophy'. As part of our new collaboration with other universities in the OSUN network, various research-related activities such as collaborative workshops and conferences with OSUN partners are planned, e.g., on Islamic (Shihadeh) and Jewish (Hezser) history and culture.

**Promoting cultural awareness**

Our UoA will continue to promote public awareness of the cultural traditions of non-Christian religious communities such as Zoroastrians, Jains, Jews, and Muslims. This happens through the lecture series organised by the Centres (§4.1) and through public lectures and workshops offered by individual academic staff.



**Decolonising research:**

SOAS has prioritised its decolonisation initiative (see IES§1, 2), and UoA members actively contribute to shaping research in this area. Many of our members are specialists in the cultures, languages, and religious traditions of the Global South and prioritise and centre the perspectives and practices of knowledge production from these regions. Their work is dedicated to understanding the complex cultural imaginaries of these contexts in their own terms, necessary to refuting Orientalist and Eurocentric accounts of religious practice, history, and doctrine. Notable in this respect are Hintze's research on Zoroastrian texts and rituals in Iran and India; Hezser's examination of the literary development of Palestinian rabbinic documents in the context of Graeco-Roman and Byzantine Christian scholasticism in late antiquity; Shihadeh's investigation of medieval Islamic philosophical traditions; Shah's projects on the development of Arabic linguistics; and Mallinson's history of premodern cannabis use in India. Several of our staff actively contribute to the theorisation of decolonial, methods, paradigms and practices. Caron is a collaborator on the ERC project 'TAKHAYYUL: Imaginative Landscapes of Islamist Politics' (PI: Sertac Sehlkoglul, UCL) and his work combines Islamic philosophy/political ontology, poetics, and ethnography to draw out how pre-rational, associative, and affective thinking operates in historical Islamist actors' own theories of emotion, communication, violence, and politics during the Afghan wars. Hawthorne's work on religion, gender and race demonstrates the role of anti-Blackness and colonialism in shaping the meanings of 'religion' and 'gender' and she explicitly foregrounds the critical, but neglected, interventions by scholars of colour (Black, post- and decolonial, and Islamic). In so doing she proposes a decolonial reconstruction of the field's core preoccupations, categories, and histories with regard to questions of affect, embodiment, agency, and spatialisation. Imafidon's research within African Philosophy similarly attends to its epistemological and methodological significance for ethics and ontology as a means of resisting Eurocentric accounts and expanding conventional understandings of lived religious and communal experience and belonging.

**Supporting research applications:**

We use our research seminars to discuss and provide peer-reviews on research projects in progress before actual funding applications are submitted. Presenting projects in-the-making and receiving comments and feedback from colleagues is key to strengthening and finalising proposals. We have also invited those whose applications were successful and who have experience with conducting large projects to talk about their strategies and give advice to others, especially those who plan to apply to the same funding agency.

**1.4 Interdisciplinarity**

Study of Religions at SOAS is profoundly interdisciplinary. Staff members are trained in Iranian Studies, Jewish Studies, Islamic Studies, Japanese Studies, Buddhist Studies, which are also already interdisciplinary fields (see §1.1 above). Methodological approaches range from philological to anthropological and more besides, and innovative combinations of these are evidenced in many if not all unit members' outputs, research projects, and the vital environment partly created through our research seminars and other events.

**1.5 Impact****1.5.1 Impact strategy 2014-20**

Our goal was to integrate impact into all large research projects, including those that focused on ancient societies. Those applying for grants were advised by impact officers in the research office. They developed their projects with impact in mind and created connections to potential stakeholders among the general public. Such stakeholders could be religious communities, museums, and the UK government. The identification of stakeholders and the creation of links between research projects and stakeholders' needs is a key priority.

**1.5.2 Implementation of impact strategy and 2021 case studies**

Impact case studies were developed in connection with four funded research projects. The two best case studies were chosen for submission.

Hintze and Stewart's impact case study entitled 'Spotlight on an Endangered Faith', has raised **public awareness of Zoroastrianism**—one of the world's oldest and least understood religions—in Iran, in the UK and India where diaspora communities reside, but whose own connection to their religious practice has been jeopardised. Zoroastrian and non-Zoroastrian communities have been engaged by means of exhibitions and public events. The project has also established programmes for the **preservation of endangered manuscripts and languages**: Zoroastrian Dari (Iran) and 'Parsi' or old Gujarati (India) and has improved curatorial practices ensuring that endangered manuscripts and languages enrich historical narratives in the UK and India. A documentary of the performance of the Yasna ritual by Zoroastrian priests in India has been made available to the general public.

Wilkinson's impact case study, 'Islam Unveiled', indicates how research on minority religions can be used to inform judges and the UK legal system. Non-Muslim judges and juries in trials of hate crimes and terrorism possess limited means of **understanding the nature of the Islamic or Islamist theological ideas** to inform their decision-making. The research has offered insights on distinguishing between mainstream Islam, ideological Islamism, and Islamist extremism. It has informed 27 trials in the UK related to Islamist or far-right extremism to help judges and juries distinguish between healthy, destructive and illegal religious and ideological acts. The research has also been used for **judicial training** of 200 High Court judges on training at the Judicial College and to inform the work of at least 40 Counter-Terrorism officials at the Home Office and the Foreign Office, 2 UK ambassadors and 2 UK Government ministers.

### 1.5.3 Future strategic plans for impact

An important goal of the UoA is to increase the impact of our research within society at large. Most funders now pay specific attention to the anticipated impact of a research project. We plan to make the potential impact one of the main criteria for developing research projects, and UoA members liaise with the research office to build in impact from the very initial conception of grant applications. There is also a SOAS-wide impact acceleration fund that supports the development of impact for already funded projects.

We plan to include stakeholders in the planning stage of larger research projects. This may involve leaders of religious communities, governmental policy makers, or the NHS. Such networking connections to public stakeholders shall be improved in the future, not least through our own engagements outside the university and by including stakeholders in our public events and research activities.

## 1.6 Open research and research integrity

### 1.6.1 Open access strategy

Researchers in the UoA are committed to using the institutional repository SOAS Research Online (SRO) (IES§2) to share their research when publishers allow us to do so. Around 33% of UoA items in SRO have the full text attached while some researchers have published Gold OA (e.g., Scott-Baumann). SOAS has an Open Access Fund for article processing charges that is open to all and researchers with external funding have OA funds built into their projects. SOAS has a dedicated Scholarly Communications Manager who works to develop a culture of dissemination and support researchers in developing strategies for open research. This approach is supported by dedicated workshops for grant holders. They are designed to ensure projects are on track in terms of OA and Research Data Management. Discussions are underway, e.g., for Flügel's Centre for Jaina Studies Newsletter to explore opportunities to host this elsewhere, with a view to allowing him to apply Creative Commons Licences etc.

### 1.6.2 Research data management

All researchers are obliged to pass an online RDM course. Large funded projects have their own digital presence. A good example of best practice in this area is Pagel's AHRC project, which documented and archived its workflow and research data in the open-source digital library Zenodo. The work-in-progress, open issues, and roadmap are shared in GitHub, and

contributions to any aspect are welcomed from anyone. Similar arrangements are in place for Pagel's second current AHRC project.

Other examples include Scott-Baumann, who has planned for data sharing (within ethical practice) with the UK Data Archive for her AHRC project. Hintze's ERC project on the Multimedia Yasna will disseminate research outputs and databases online and via other channels. The project will host sessions at international conferences and many of the results will be made available publicly via a GIS-enabled OA website that will be responsive to user queries. Journal articles on specific themes will be published in Gold OA journals together with a series of research monographs.

Mallinson's approach to data management for his Yoga project includes plans for long-term storage of the data his project produces. All primary outputs of his project will be Open Access. The project data (manuscript scans and photos, plus fieldwork photos and films) will be archived on Zenodo and the texts of the critical editions will be submitted to SARIT. Project data which cannot be made OA due to restrictions will be available to individual researchers on request.

In connection with his Leverhulme grant on Jaina Prosopography, Flügel is working with the Sheffield Humanities Institute on a data model and database, full search functionality, data visualisation, data export functionality for export in long-listing formats which will allow full data archiving and a front-end website.

## 2. People

### 2.1 Staffing structure and strategy

Between 2014 and 2020 several members of the UoA have left SOAS to take up positions at other universities (Hartung in 2016, Haustein in 2019, Tournier in 2018, Kim in 2020), to enter retirement (Zene in 2017) or voluntary redundancy (Palumbo, Proferes, Singh), or for other reasons (Hunter). The goal is to fill vacant positions strategically, based on recognisable gaps in expertise within the school and UoA. Hartung's post in Islam was refilled by a lecturer in Islamicate South Asia whose research is submitted under the History UoA. In addition, a new appointment in World Philosophies, with a special expertise in African Religion and Philosophy, has been made in 2020 (Imafidon). Li, a Robert H. N. Ho Family Foundation Postdoctoral Fellow at the Centre of Buddhist Studies, also joined the UoA in 2020, after receiving a Ph.D. in Japan with a focus on pre-modern East Asian Buddhist Thought.

### 2.2 Equality and diversity

The UoA strictly adheres to an equal opportunities policy in staff recruitment (see also IES§2.1, 3.3). This has increased diversity, especially as far as gender equality is concerned. Approximately 33% of members of the UoA are female and 24% are BAME. One member of the UoA has a declared disability. To increase diversity, SOAS offers equality and diversity training that is obligatory for members of recruitment committees and REF coordinators. Diversity in recruitment, retention, and promotion is supported at all levels of the staffing process.

### 2.3 Early career staff

The UoA places great emphasis on the support and development of all new appointees. Early-career staff undergo a probation period of 3 years, attend **induction and training courses**, have lighter teaching and administration loads, are given mentors and are entitled to apply for two terms of research leave at the end of the probation period. Leave at this level is a deliberate decision of SOAS to support early career researchers. All new staff are allocated a mentor for the period of their probation. The annual probationary review scheme entails a full review of research goals and opportunities.

During the review period the UoA has been hosting a senior researcher (Singleton 2015-20, mentor: Mallinson, ERC-funded) and several postdoctoral fellows: Birch 2015-20 (mentor: Mallinson, ERC funding), Goldman 2016-19 (mentor: Hintze, ERC funding); Redard-Jacot 2017-

20 (mentor: Hintze, ERC funding); Krümpelmann (mentor: Flügel, Leverhulme funding), Padoan 2015-16 (mentor: Dolce, BA/Leverhulme funding), and Li (Robert H. N. Ho Family Foundation grant; mentor: Dolce).

Successful applications for larger research grants enable the establishment of **scholarships** at MA and Ph.D. level and postdoctoral fellowships. This is the case with Hintze's MUYI project, for example. Since 2018, 5 postdoctoral fellows have been funded by the project to work on Zoroastrianism. 3 of them continue into the next REF period, while 2 have finished their research and left SOAS. The externally funded Shapoorji Pallonji Institute of Zoroastrian Studies offers scholarships to MA and PhD students whose research is supervised by members of the UoA. One MA student who completed his dissertation in 2018 presented a version of the thesis at the ARAM Oxford Conference in July 2018. Laura Hassan, a former PhD student in Islam, won the **Classical Islamic World Book Prize** for her doctoral thesis in 2018. Other postgraduate students collaborate and co-author books and articles with permanent staff (e.g., Singh and Kim). Members of the UoA also collaborate with and mentor post-doctoral researchers and help them apply for grants. For example, Dolce's PhD student Emanuela Sala, has been awarded a Ho Foundation Dissertation Fellowship by the American Council of Learned Societies; Flügel's PhD student Manu Ato-Carrera has won the Khyentse Foundation Ph.D. Scholarship as well as several other grants for 2020-21 (see also §2.7).

Postdoctoral researchers are strengthened in several ways. If they are on SOAS contracts they are included in the **mentoring programme**, offering them regular meetings with a senior academic in their field. Postdoctoral and senior teaching fellows can be included in the annual Staff Development Review to help them fulfil their research goals. Postdoctoral researchers from SOAS, the UK, and abroad can apply for the status of **research associates**, if their projects fit into the UoA's and HRP's research agenda. All doctoral students and postdoctoral researchers are invited to the regular research seminars and to the lectures and workshops offered by the research centres. Finally, both postdoctoral researchers and more senior academics can apply for the SOAS **seed-corn fund** to organise workshops and conferences or finance travel to archives in preparation for larger funding applications.

#### 2.4 Staff development

SOAS offers a variety of courses (ranging from computer skills and data management to anti-bias training) to all staff, taught as on-site workshops or made available online. The School is committed to the Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers. It aims to increase the attractiveness and sustainability of research careers in the UK and to improve the quantity, quality, and impact of research for the benefit of UK society. The annual Staff Development Review (SDR) is obligatory for all research-active permanent staff and is offered on a voluntary basis to postdoctoral researchers and teaching fellows. It is conducted through collegial meetings, in which progress during the last review period is discussed together with plans for the coming academic year. The SDR allows each research-active staff member to set objectives, track progress, and identify training and development needs. It is now supplemented by the Research Mentoring scheme, which is compulsory for all staff and post-doctoral researchers as well as open on a voluntary basis to teaching fellows.

#### 2.5 Research support

All research staff can apply for one term of School-funded research leave after 8 terms of teaching (see IES§2). Those whose third-party funding applications are successful automatically receive research leave for the period of their funding. In terms of workload, all staff on permanent contracts are entitled to spend 40% of their work time on research. Most colleagues reserve one day a week for research purposes during teaching terms, in addition to the term breaks and reading weeks.

Staff can apply for various internal SOAS grants that support research: the Seed-Corn Fund that allows applications several times a year and is meant to support activities that will lead to larger research grant applications; the Impact Fund that supports the development of impact case



studies; and an Open Access Publication Fund that enables the publication of research with publishers that charge fees for granting open access.

## 2.6 Academic promotion

For promotion to Senior Lecturer, Reader, and Professor research publications and success in acquiring grants, teaching excellence, and administrative roles are taken into account. Every staff member on a permanent contract can submit an application for promotion in the annual rounds. Applications are discussed by a Promotions Committee that consists of professors from all schools and is headed by the SOAS Director. Decisions are made on an equal-opportunities basis after rigorous scrutiny of the submitted material based on both internal and external reviews and assessments.

In the current REF cycle, Shihadeh was promoted to the rank of Reader (2016), and Pagel (2017) and Flügel (2019) to the rank of Professor.

## 2.7 Training and supervision of research students

The recruitment, training, and supervision of doctoral students is an important part of the UoA's research culture (see also IES§3.2). In the current REF cycle, members of the UoA supervised a total of 274 doctoral students. On average, slightly more of them are female (55%) than male (45%). The percentage of **BAME students** varies from one year to the next. The highest rate was 59% in 2016-17. Until 2018-19, the percentage of BAME students amongst research students was **higher than 50%**, i.e. much higher than the average of BAME PhD students at other UK universities. The percentage of students with declared disabilities has increased from 2013-14 (5%) to 2019-20 (16%), perhaps because students have become more confident with declaring disabilities, a goal facilitated by the School's dedicated Disability and Neurodiversity Team.

Students registered for full-time research degrees submit their thesis within four years of enrolment; those who study part-time have a total of seven years. During the first year all students are registered as M.Phil. researchers and are required to attend a year-long **research writing workshop** in the department which helps them prepare their upgrade material that is discussed during an upgrade viva in May/June. They also receive additional training and support through the SOAS Doctoral School established in 2012 (IES§3.2). Those who pass the viva successfully are registered as Ph.D. students from year 2 onwards. Research students have 2 supervisors each, with whom they have continuous supervision meetings throughout the year. The recent introduction of the online **Ph.D. Manager** system has greatly improved the administration of research degrees. Both the introduction of a 4- (PR 7-) year submission deadline and the possibility to track progress on Ph.D. Manager have **significantly improved Ph.D. submission rates**. In the period under review here (2013/14-2019/20) a total of 69 research students have successfully completed their PhDs within the UoA.

As far as Ph.D. funding is concerned, SOAS-wide **research scholarships** are available that are distributed amongst applicants in annual scrutiny meetings. To increase diversity, students from BAME backgrounds are now given precedence in situations of equal qualification. In addition, all already admitted research students can apply for conference funding, language acquisition funding, fieldwork funding, and the student-led initiatives fund that enables early career researchers to organise interdisciplinary workshops and conferences.

## 2.8 Collaborative research student training

Research student training activities beyond SOAS include research student training networks in Japan (Dolce), the Universities of Ghent and Erfurt (Flügel), Trinity College Dublin, the University of Oslo, and the University of Utrecht (Hezser); UCL (Hunter, Palumbo, Zene); École Pratique des Hautes Études, Paris (Tournier) and external PhD supervision Monash University, Australia (Hintze). SOAS also participates in CHASE doctoral training partnerships that enable our research students to participate in the placement scheme.

### 3. Income, infrastructure and facilities

#### 3.1 Research income

During the current REF cycle the UoA secured 20 research grants, which indicates a **high success rate of 27%** between 2014-20. The total value of research grants, including partner costs, awarded over the period amounts to **£6,553,098.42**. The UoA's success in securing research grants constitutes a major achievement that is matched by few other subject areas at SOAS.

Especially noteworthy are: the EHRC grant of £1,451,155, awarded in 2016/17 for the project 'MUYA: The Multimedia Yasna' (Hintze); an EHRC grant of £1,420,170 awarded in 2015/16 for 'The Hatha Yoga Project: Mapping Indian and Transnational Traditions of Physical Yoga through Philology and Ethnography' (Mallinson); an AHRC grant of £792,550 awarded in 2016/17 for 'Lexicography in Motion: A History of the Tibetan Verb' (Pagel); and an AHRC grant of £503,901 awarded in 2014/15 for 'Re/presenting Islam on Campus: Gender, Radicalisation and Interreligious Understanding in British Higher Education' (Scott-Baumann).

In addition, the **Shapoorji Pallonji Institute of Zoroastrian Studies** was established in 2017 with a **private endowment of £5 million**. One of its main functions is to provide MA and PhD scholarships to create a pool of future scholars of Zoroastrianism.

#### 3.2 Research infrastructure and facilities

A key feature of the UoA's research facilities is the SOAS library (see also IES§4.2), which specialises in the regional cultures of Africa, Asia, and the Middle East. It contains much **material that is unique to SOAS**, reflecting the British interaction with Africa and Asia over the last 250 years, such as archives of missionary societies and photographs of early 20<sup>th</sup>-century India, including Hindu and Jain temples and religious rituals. Subject librarians support research students, postdoctoral researchers, and permanent members of staff. The library offers many online databases that enable access to its collections from one's office or home computer. In addition to the SOAS library, members of the UoA have access to other libraries in London such as the British Library with its manuscript collections, the Senate House Library, and the UCL Library.

As far as IT equipment and support is concerned, all members of the UoA have office computers or laptops that are regularly updated by IT staff, who are also always available for IT-related queries.

Researchers can rely on the SOAS Research Office for administrative support with grant applications. The online platform **Worktribe** enables applicants and research office staff to develop, track, and peer review applications. The major funding agencies such as the AHRC, the Leverhulme Trust, and the European Research Council regularly host workshops at SOAS.

### 4. Collaboration and contribution to the research base, economy and society

All members of the UoA have active networks of collaboration within the UK and internationally. They organise and participate in international conferences, serve as referees for national and international funding organisations, assess manuscripts for book publishers and journals, take leadership roles in scholarly associations (e.g., Shihadeh as the [co-]chair of the BRAIS from 2012-19), serve as editors of journals and book series, give keynote lectures, and collaborate with institutions nearby such as the British Library and the British Museum. Only a few examples can be presented here.

#### 4.1 Outreach activities of the Centres

##### 4.1.1 Centre of Jaina Studies

The aim of the Centre of Jaina Studies is to promote the study of Jaina religion and culture by providing an interdisciplinary platform for academic research, teaching and publication. It

conducts Annual Jaina Lectures that are aimed at the Jaina community and a wider public audience and issues an annual newsletter that informs subscribers of the Centre's activities. In 2016 Flügel co-organised an international two-day conference on the Bhagavad Gita at the Nehru Centre, London. In 2017 Flügel (together with a collaborator) started a new three-year Leverhulme Trust-funded research project on 'Jaina Prosopography: Monastic Lineages, Networks and Patronage'. An initial seminar was held at Koba Gyanmandir, near Ahmedabad, bringing together participants from SOAS, the Digital Humanities Institute of the University of Sheffield, Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, and participants from other institutions. To generate future researchers, the Centre bestows its Jaina Essay and Dissertation Prizes for the best student work in Jaina Studies at SOAS.

#### **4.1.2 Centre of Buddhist Studies**

The Centre of Buddhist Studies, chaired by Dolce, is a hub of Buddhist scholarship that generates synergy among academics and research students, from SOAS and beyond, involved in the study of Buddhism in Asian societies. Through lectures and workshops, it enables new audiences to appreciate and understand some of the cutting-edge research on Buddhism currently carried out at SOAS and internationally. International conferences held include: 'Just Buddhists? Monasticism and issues of hierarchy, freedom, and fairness in Buddhist Asia' (2014); 'Spirited Dharma: Exploring Spirit Possession in Asian Buddhist Traditions' (2015); and a SOAS Centre of Buddhist Studies Postgraduate Workshop (2017). The Buddhist Forum, established in 1987, is a long-standing and well reputed lecture series organised by the Centre of Buddhist Studies. The Centre has been awarded a donation from the Khyentse Foundation to support this lecture series from 2017-18 onwards. In addition, the Robert H. N. Ho Family Foundation Lecture Series in Chinese Buddhism launched in October 2017 and features three events per year. Each event consists of two parts: a formal lecture intended for the general public and a seminar open to postgraduate students and researchers.

#### **4.1.3 Centre for the Study of Japanese Religions**

The Centre for the Study of Japanese Religions, also chaired by Dolce, was founded in 1999 by a generous donation from the International Shinto Foundation. The Centre exists to promote the academic study of Japanese religions past and present in all their rich diversity and dynamism. To this end, the Centre hosts a regular seminar series and a post-graduate discussion group, the Japanese Religions Forum, as well as international workshops and conferences. The Centre welcomes applications from outstanding students of Japanese religion for its post-graduate bursaries. Since 2013, the Centre has hosted 8 workshops and conferences, amongst them 'Buddhist Medicine and Asian Medical Systems Workshop' (2013), and 'Thus Have I Heard: Sound and Buddhism in Japan' (2019).

#### **4.1.4 Centre of World Christianity**

The Centre of World Christianity, co-chaired by Hunter and Haustein until the summer of 2020, promotes the study of the historic and modern contexts of Christianity in Africa and Asia by organising, hosting or facilitating conferences, public lectures, meetings, workshops and seminars. In 2014 the 8<sup>th</sup> international and interdisciplinary conference of the European Research Network on Global Pentecostalism was organised by the Centre. In 2016 the Centre hosted a conference on 'Religions and Development: Redrawing a Research Agenda' that launched a new Development Studies Association study group on this topic. Since 2014 the Centre also provided continuous updates on the situation of Christian communities in Iraq and Syria through public lectures by speakers from SOAS and abroad.

#### **4.1.5 Shapoorji Pallonji Institute of Zoroastrian Studies**

With the generous support from a Parsi benefactor, Mr Shapoor Mistry, in the name of his grandfather, Mr Pallonji Shapoorji Mistry, the SOAS Institute of Zoroastrian Studies was founded in 2018. The remit of the Institute is to raise the profile of Zoroastrianism worldwide in three areas: teaching, research and outreach. It is headed by Hintze and Stewart. Its outreach activities have increased the profile of Zoroastrianism in the UK and worldwide. A newsletter informs the general public about its activities, and the work of the Institute in promoting understanding of Zoroastrianism and collaborating with Zoroastrian communities

#### 4.2 Organisation of and participation in international conferences

The organisation of and participation in international conferences is crucial for the presentation of research results, scholarly exchange, and networking. Besides the conferences and workshops organised by the centres, mentioned above, individual staff members have (co)organised international and interdisciplinary conferences that were partly funded by third parties and they delivered keynote addresses at conferences and universities abroad.

For example, in 2014 Hezser co-organized a joint British-Israeli conference on 'Jewish Art in Its Late Antique Context' at the Hebrew University Jerusalem, funded by the British Friends of the Hebrew University and the Academic Study Group. Between 2017-20 Hezser also co-organised several conferences with colleagues of the Faculty of Theology of the University of Oslo, Norway, that were funded by a Norwegian grant. In 2016 Flügel co-organised a conference on 'Max Weber's Hinduism and Buddhism: Reflections on a Sociological Classic 100 Years On', together with the editor of *Max Weber Studies*. In 2014 Shihadeh organised a conference on 'Philosophical Theology in Islam' that focused on the Kalam (rational theology). He has now also received funding to co-organise an international conference on 'Islamic Rationalism Transformed: The 12th and 13th Centuries' at NYU Abu Dhabi, scheduled for 2021/22. At the beginning of 2020, Dolce organised a workshop on 'Unlocking Buddhist Heritage' together with the British Library.

Before the Covid-19 crisis, members of the UoA participated in a large number of international conferences annually. For example, in the 2017-18 academic year, Hezser gave lectures at 18 international conferences that took place in the UK and abroad. As far as invitations to prestigious lecture series and keynote addresses are concerned, Hezser was invited to deliver the annual **Tria Corda Lectures in Comparative Religion** at the Friedrich Schiller University in Jena, Germany, in November 2017. The five lectures were published as a monograph in 2018. In 2018 Dolce gave a keynote lecture at Princeton University and in 2019 Hintze addressed the meeting of the Zoroastrian Association in Houston, USA. Further in 2019, Shihadeh talked about 'The Future of Islamic Philosophy' at Syracuse University, USA.

#### 4.3 Editorships and peer review

Altogether, members of the UoA have reviewed manuscripts for 45 journals and 14 publishers and assessed research applications for 20 funding bodies. Several colleagues serve as editors and co-editors of book series and journals, including book series published by Bloomsbury (Hezser: *Education, Literary Culture, and Religious Practice in the Ancient World*), Brill (Dolce: *Encyclopaedia of Buddhism*; Hintze: *Corpus Avesticum*; Hezser: *Intersectional Studies* and *Ancient Law and Religion*; Shihadeh: *Islamic Translation* series); Harrassowitz (Flügel: *Jaina Studies*); Brepols (Hunter: *Corpus Fontium Manichaeorum*; *Series Syriaca*); Bulletin of SOAS (Pagel; Shihadeh since 2018); Routledge (Flügel: *Advances in Jaina Studies*; Hezser: *Handbook of Jewish and Judaism in Late Antiquity*; Singh: *Sikh Formations: Religion, Culture, Theory*; founding editor of *Religions and Development*); *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* and *Nihon bukkyo sogo kenkyu* (Dolce); *Journal of Religion and Gender* (Hawthorne).

#### 4.4 Scholarly honours

Honours received since 2014 include Hintze's election to the Fellowship of the British Academy (2015) and as representative of the British Academy to the International Union of Academies in 2018. Four members of the UoA were appointed Visiting Professors: Hezser was Professor II at the Faculty of Theology of the University of Oslo for three years (2017-20); Hintze served as visiting professor at the Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, Pune (July 2015); Dolce at various universities in Japan, Korea, and Ireland; Shihadeh at the University of Erlangen-Nuremberg (2019-20). From 2019-21 he is Senior Humanities Research Fellow at New York University in Abu Dhabi.

#### 4.5 Stakeholder engagement

Public engagement happens in various contexts on an ongoing basis. For example, several members of the UoA (Hezser, Hunter, Shah) gave presentations in the context of adult



education at the 'Sacred Scriptures' workshop at the **British Library** in 2016. Members of the UoA also engage in individual outreach activities and public events, e.g., Hezser's lecture at the **National Theatre** that accompanied the 'Lehmann Trilogy' play; her participation in a podium-discussions during the annual **Jewish Film Festival**. Shah has liaised with the **British Council** and the **Ministry of Education** to develop a partnership in Islamic Studies with the Philippines. In 2017 Scott-Baumann sent a SOAS student to give evidence about the Charity Commission to the **Joint Committee on Human Rights** for their 2017-18 investigation of freedom of speech in universities. In January 2018 Scott-Baumann was herself called to give evidence. Members of the UoA have also served as expert **witnesses in asylum cases**. Hunter has spoken out on behalf of Syrian refugees and Christian communities in Syria. Wilkinson has given interviews on Islamic radicalisation to the **BBC**. Singh has represented the Sikh community and given advice on the Modi government in India. Since January 2020, Alison Scott-Baumann is conducting a **Strategic Priority Fund** supported project on '**Influencing the Corridors of Power**' (see IES§2), which issues bulletins and podcasts on urgent matters sent to every MP, Lord, and policymaker in Westminster. She also participated in a UK government-funded '**Universities and Muslim Seminaries**' project. In January 2019, the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government commissioned her to work with Islamic seminaries and mainstream UK universities to forge partnerships

In late 2013 Hintze and Stewart co-organised the **SOAS exhibition 'The Everlasting Flame: Zoroastrianism in History and Imagination'** in collaboration with the British Museum and the British Library. The MUYA Virtual Reality video that was part of this exhibition received a Special Mention at the 2020 British Association of Film, Television and Screen Studies awards ceremony and is included in the Best Practice Research Portfolio 2020 Installations and Video Essays Special Mentions. Stewart and Hintze took this exhibition to the **National Museum in Delhi** in 2016. The exhibition was a major event and was supported by funding from the Government of India. In addition to achieving high-profile press coverage, the exhibition cemented SOAS's collaboration not only with the National Museum, but also with other organisations in India such as PARZOR (Parsi-Zoroastrian Heritage) and the Alpaiwalla Museum in Mumbai.

#### 4.6 Annual public lecture series

Major annual events hosted by the UoA include the **Numata Visiting Lectureship in Buddhist Studies** and the **Idea of Iran conference**. In addition, there are two distinguished endowed annual lectures: the **Kutar Memorial Lecture in Zoroastrianism** and the **Louis H. Jordan Lectures in Comparative Religion**. Over the years, the Jordan Lectures have been delivered by many distinguished scholars, and most of them were published in book form. E.g., in 2014 Prof. Witzel from Harvard University delivered lectures on 'A New Approach to Mythology: Historical Comparative Mythology'; in 2016 Prof. Gardner from the University of Sydney spoke about 'The Many Lives of Mani: Inter-Religious Polemic and Scholarly Controversy'; in 2018 Prof. Sharf from the University of California in Berkeley talked about 'Realism, Anti-realism, and the Looping Structure of Buddhist Thought'. The Jordan Lectures present cutting-edge research in World Religions to scholars, students, and the general public.

#### 4.7 Covid-19: challenges and opportunities

(see also IES Covid-19 Annex)

Globally, Covid-19 has had a great impact on academic research but also presented new opportunities. Money was saved by moving conferences, workshops, and evening lectures online, e.g., two workshops on 'Nature and Ecology in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam', organised in collaboration with the University of Oslo, and the CJS lecture series on 'Jews and Health: Tradition, History and Practice', which attracted much larger audiences than on-campus events. Collaboration with colleagues abroad and the joint preparation of research grant applications also benefited from online meetings. Thus, this challenge has also led to new opportunities.