

Open Letter to the Directors of SOAS University of London

Friday 18th January 2019

Dear Directors,

On behalf of the Board of the Middle East Libraries Committee (MELCOM) UK I am writing to you with a plea to reconsider your plan to implement the cuts you have announced.

Middle East Librarianship and information management as currently represented at SOAS receives international recognition for its services to academia with a remit reaching the wider public as a result. Our work as subject librarians and curators of such collections requires a combined approach of methodologies and includes fostering the application of Digital Humanities tools as much as retaining the use of conventional sources where technology has not yet caught up.

In fact much of the innovative services provided by vendors from the Middle East are a result of our combined work and our role as communicators between the publishing and distribution industry and the academic communities.

The challenges to our roles have increased substantially in the last decade but we have been keeping up due to our dedication to the work, which for most of us is a lifelong occupation. Proposing to nearly halve your team of specialist librarians would in effect force the remaining regional librarians to shoulder an unsustainably heavy workload. This would be detrimental to the development of both the non-regional and the regional collections and their correlated services.

As for the UK, our committee is experiencing a drastic decrease of participation due to similar measures in other Universities like Manchester and Leeds to name only two.

We are all counting on SOAS as one of the strongholds of the field in the UK together with Oxford and Cambridge to continue its role and be responsive to the demands of academia, Librarianship and the role of higher education in a society endangered by a decreasing quest for critical thinking.

Sincerely,

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