

SOAS Influencing the Corridors of Power Project (ICOP)

June 2024 Review

OVERVIEW

Based at SOAS, [Influencing the Corridors of Power](#) is a ground-breaking project that promotes the impact of ongoing university-based research and the expertise of lawyers, medical professionals and other specialists in the House of Commons and House of Lords. The impact of the first three years of this project has been captured and documented in the September 2023 report '[SOAS ICOP & APPG Triennial Review 2020-2023](#)'. Since then, SOAS ICOP has continued to build on its strong track record of impacting legislation through timely briefings and expert panel events. It has also strengthened by collaborating with Aziz Foundation to welcome salaried interns, and has forged even stronger ties with SOAS students. The breadth of our work and the scope of its reach was encapsulated in the 24-hour consultation we held at St George's House, Windsor, which brought together vice-chancellors, legal practitioners, academics, researchers and students to examine how UK campuses can seek a balance between fostering free speech and maintaining academic freedom amidst institutional, legal, political and social pressures. This funding bid encapsulates achievements and milestones since the publication of the triennial review, and presents some of the events already planned for the rest of 2024, after the general election and the state opening of parliament on 17 July. The state opening sets out the agenda for the new parliament.

This work is vital for SOAS: as the philosopher and author Umberto Eco points out in the first of his *Five Moral Pieces*, academics/ intellectuals are often not good at engaging with the world of live politics since '*The intellectual function is always exercised ahead of time (regarding what might happen) or with hindsight (regarding what has happened), seldom with regard to what is actually happening*' (2001:16). Associate Director of Research

Professor Alison Scott-Baumann has already produced two academic and applied publications that bridge this divide and underpin this project and more will follow:

[Paul Ricoeur: Empowering Education, Politics and Society](#) 2023 Open access

[Freedom of Speech in Universities: Islam, Charities and Counter-terrorism](#) 2023 Open access

ICOP AT WESTMINSTER

ICOP Briefings

Our engagements in the UK Parliament have been instrumental in bringing research-based policy briefings to the forefront of legislative debates. Through briefings and presentations, we have ensured that our findings are considered by key policymakers, who have widely recognized and cited them during legislative debates.

Since ICOP's last review in September 2023, we have published and disseminated 10 briefings to parliamentarians. Five of these were concerned with [the Data Protection and Digital Information Bill](#) and authored by barrister [Eleonor Duhs](#), partner and head of Data Privacy at Bates Wells. With the announcement of the General Election, and controversial late amendments added by the Department of Work and Pensions unresolved, [the Bill has fallen](#).

Four briefings were related to Israel/Palestine, and were authored by different experts, including NHS doctors, a legal academic, an author-historian, campaigners and a former British Consul General to Jerusalem; the most recent of these – just before the [dissolution of parliament](#) – called upon the UK government to join Ireland, Norway and Spain in officially recognizing the State of Palestine. The publication of this briefing marked ICOP's 90th briefing.

The tenth [briefing](#) called upon peers to support amendments to the Safety of Rwanda (Asylum and Immigration) Bill that would restore the proper constitutional role of the courts, uphold the UK's human rights obligations and other international obligations, and

protect the most vulnerable groups, such as victims of trafficking and unaccompanied children. Voices of Impact

Testimonials from key stakeholders, participants, and policymakers who have engaged with us attest to the impact and significance of SOAS ICOP briefings.

Notable recent citations:

1. Data Protection Briefing referenced in the debate on the data bill

"We should be very grateful to Eleanor Duhs for her SOAS ICOP policy briefing..." Lord Clement-Jones read the entire [ICOP briefing](#) at the Affirmative Debate on the Data Protection (Fundamental Rights and Freedoms) Regulations 2023 in the House of Lords on 12 December 2023. At the end of his speech, he thanked SOAS. [Data Protection \(Fundamental Rights and Freedoms\) \(Amendment\) Regulations 2023 Hansard](#).

2. Email response to "[The Data Protection & Digital Information Bill & The Consequences Of Lowering UK Standards II](#)" on 18 December 2023 from Lord Hannay of Chiswick, who shared concerns outlined in the briefing and engaged in nuanced inquiry as to the background debates on the Bill from the Foreign Secretary. SOAS ICOP connected Lord Hannay's policy-focused inquiry with the expert authors of the briefing whereby a very technical and detailed dialogue occurred via email.

"Thank you. I share these concerns. When they were raised by the European Affairs Committee with Lord Cameron on 14 December, the Foreign Secretary replied that several other third countries - Japan and New Zealand were mentioned - had different data protection regimes from the EU's GDPR without that having put at risk their grant of equivalent status by the EU. Is that a fair argument, and if not, what is the best way to counter it? Are we aware of the EU Commission having raised any concerns with the UK government about the new Bill?"

3. Email response from the House of Commons Petitions Committee acknowledging receipt of the briefing, "[Petitions Debate \(13/05/2024\): A UK Gaza Family Scheme is Imperative](#)". The committee advised it was sent to Cat Smith MP who was leading the debate.

4. Policy briefing under the spotlight: “Official Recognition of the State of Palestine: The Time is Now” published 22 May 2024. The authors in this briefing were able to reference their research as evidence, which allowed them to link to their research and findings or outcome.

ICOP Events (via SOAS ICOP’s APPG)

Launched in July 2022, the All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on Communities of Inquiry across the Generations seeks to provide practical models for conducting productive debates between younger and older generations on complex topics by bringing together parliamentarians, university staff and students, and young citizens. It aims to facilitate academic and expert evidence-based discussions on critical matters such as UK legislation, international affairs, equality and identity.

Since September 2023, SOAS ICOP has held a number of events in the House of Lords, House of Commons and Portcullis House, and further events are planned:

1. [Gender and the Legacy of the War on Iraq: 20 Years On](#) in the House of Lords on 18 October 2023 **(66 registered, 145 views, 2 comments, 3 likes)**
2. [Prevent and Civil Liberties](#) in Portcullis House on 15 November 2023 **(102 registered, 32 views, 1 like)**
3. [Climate Commitment: Holding the Government Accountable](#) on Net-Zero on 16 January 2024 in the House of Lords **(97 registered, 19 views, 1 like)**
4. [The Targeting of Palestinian Journalists](#) on 26 February 2024 at the House of Commons (95 registered, @Nina elaborate on SOAS VC getting contacted by AJ and invite to the team as audience)

ICOP AT SOAS

Harnessing and promoting SOAS expertise

SOAS ICOP’s work is underpinned by the appreciation for the need to forge productive links and relationships between universities, academic staff, other

experts, students and parliamentarians to influence policy. Our first resource is the vast expertise housed at SOAS, which we seek to harness to deliver impact. We believe that SOAS ICOP has a moral agency that is strengthened by constructive engagement with myriad political positions and viewpoints.

SOAS ICOP is values-led and topic agnostic and we carefully time events inside Westminster and on campus to coincide with policy cycles of critical issues. Being in the heart of London, a mere 20-minutes away from parliament, SOAS is ideally placed. We center ethical language in all ICOP Briefings, in ICOP's use of social media, and in events at Westminster and SOAS. We remain active and positive in our use of democratic processes through our work with parliamentarians and the APPG Communities of Inquiry across the generations, and celebrate successes to encourage expansion and enhancement of activities.

Engagement with SOAS staff and students

We currently support and advise the following academics:

- Pallavi Roy, Jonathan Goodhand, Clara Della Croce, Mushtaq Khan, Emma Crewe, Althea Rivas
- SOAS academics chair ICOP panels or speak on a panel either at SOAS or in Westminster. SOAS academics contribute regularly to our briefings.
- Staff and student engagement with SOAS ICOP is increasing, with many students finding ICOP events and engagement with expert voices both insightful and constructive. The student turnout at our discussions is substantial.



Francesca Debenham speaks with diplomacy students at SOAS University of London on 29/02/2024. Photo courtesy of Haleema Hijazi.

In February 2024, ICOP organised a panel discussion for c.40 graduate students of diplomacy with Francesca Debenham, a high-ranking diplomat who served as a legal counselor at the British Embassy in Washington.

In March 2024, c.14 students from the politics department benefitted from a discussion with Baroness Usha Prashar on the role of the House of Lords, the state of democracy, civil rights, and international politics.

In May 2024, former president of ICOP Student Society and current SOAS ICOP research assistant Haleema Hijazi co-chaired a panel along with Head of the Politics Department Dr Matthew Nelson with former prime minister of Pakistan Shahid Khaqan Abbasi, which was attended by 70 students. C. 15 students joined Abbasi for a pre-event conversation.



Former Prime Minister of Pakistan Shahid Abbasi meets students at SOAS University of London on 24/05/2024. Photo courtesy of Haleema Hijazi.

SOAS ICOP has also been fostering interest in its APPG and taking students to events at Portcullis House such as [Prevent and Civil Liberties](#) (Nov 2023) and [The Targeting of Palestinian Journalists](#) (Feb 2024). Being present and represented at such events in Westminster has empowered SOAS students and reinforced their belief in democratic processes. Such experiences have broadened their understanding of political mechanisms and strengthened their commitment to civic engagement.

The impact of ICOP–student engagement is reflected in sustained involvement with the ICOP Student Society which was founded in September 2022, and has 80 members. The strength of activism has led to the emergence of new student leadership in 2024, namely: Tamara Elhalwani, Affan Alavi, Kabir Mehta, and Unzeela Manzoor. They collaborate closely with SOAS ICOP to model ICOP’s work for the student society, ensuring that the values and objectives of ICOP are effectively carried forward yearly to the new cohorts.

Through these efforts, ICOP has successfully fostered a vibrant and engaged student community, dedicated to leveraging academic expertise to influence policy and enact positive change.

ICOP Introduction in a Global Public Policy lecture

Dr Vino Kanapathipillai, Co-Director of the Centre on Conflict, Rights and Justice asked ICOP team members to speak to students at a Global Public Policy module lecture. She regularly invites experts working in public policy to speak to students to give them an insight about working in policy and was interested in the ICOP project as an initiative students could already get involved in during their studies. Sanjana Deen and Rana Osman went to speak to the c. 80 students and take their questions. Some later attended a meeting arranged by the ICOP Student Society to find out what activities they could participate in.

University Campus Events

SOAS ICOP has organized a series of successful events on university campuses that have facilitated critical discussions among students, academics, and policymakers. These events have included workshops and panel discussions on various policy issues.

Key Events:

1. [The Legacy of the War on Terror: Guantanamo Bay](#) on 21 November 2023 (**142 registered, 88 views, 1 like**).
2. Policy Workshop with ICOP Student Society - Engaging students in meaningful dialogue on 30 October 2024 (**14 registered**)
3. [Book Talk with Natalie Bennett, MP, in Conversation with Divya Talwar on “Change Everything”](#) on 22 April 2024 (**45 registered**)
4. ICOP Palestine Series:
 - a. [The Media’s Coverage of Gaza - Israel](#) on 25 April 2024 (**178 registered, 664 views, 12 subscribers gained**)

- b. [The Politics of Antisemitism](#) on 30 April 2024 (live streamed and in person, full house, 163 registered, 907 views (92.9 watch hours), 16 comments that we consider tangible engagement, 10 likes, 4 dislikes, 5 subscribers gained)
- c. [Dealing Destruction: The Global Arms Trade and Gaza](#) on 15 May 2024 (138 registered, 220 views, 15 likes)

AZIZ FOUNDATION INTERNSHIPS

Since 2022, the Aziz Foundation have been funding internships with various organisations to aid Muslim graduates gain more experience in the policy field, an area in which Muslims are under-represented. SOAS ICOP created an internship proposal that was submitted to the Aziz Foundation in 2023, which was accepted and ICOP was granted funding for two part-time interns for six months. ICOP is currently in discussions with Baroness Carmen Smith of Llanfaes, a Plaid Cymru peer, to have Aziz interns work with her in the Lords for part of the internship when parliament returns.

In February 2024 SOAS ICOP introduced two interns to the team through its new Aziz Foundation internship . Throughout the programme, the interns have been working alongside ICOP's diverse and experienced team to build an understanding of policy work. The interns have been able to explore and carry out research across a wide range of current policy related issues and gained an insight into the process of writing and publishing one-page briefings. The interns have also had the opportunity to outreach to lawyers, non-profit organisations and think tanks, building contacts for potential briefings and creating more exposure for ICOP's work.

Additionally, the programme has allowed the interns to collaborate across the team in assisting with the organisation and running of expert panel events. This also includes outreach and designing graphics for the events as well working independently to organise events based on the intern's areas of interest.

Furthermore, their work has involved developing ICOP's social media presence through video content and enhancing ICOP's social media strategy, including the introduction of Instagram reels.

ICOP AT ST GEORGES' HOUSE, WINDSOR

On 5 – 6 February 2024, SOAS ICOP's Communities of Inquiry (CofI) APPG led a two-day workshop in collaboration with St George's House Consultation at Windsor, entitled "Democracy and Free Speech on Campus: Theory and Practice." The workshop was attended by twenty-six participants, including high-level stakeholders from various London-based universities and beyond, legal practitioners, academics, researchers and students.

The workshop took on the intricate task of examining how UK campuses can seek a balance between fostering free speech and maintaining academic freedom amidst institutional, legal, political and social pressures.

During the workshop, attendees were prompted to think about the problem of self-censorship, the ways in which social media can affect academic discourse, the effects of power dynamics within academic environments, and the wider societal consequences of limiting free speech. The sessions covered topics such as cancel culture, the subjective nature of harassment, the importance of empathy, and the bureaucratic hurdles that educational institutions face, including the role of vice-chancellors in balancing the preservation of free speech with the fulfillment of their public duties, and that under the government's counter-extremism strategy, Prevent with the new HE free speech law.

Emphasizing the imperative for universities to become architects of their own future, crafting policies that balance the promotion of free speech with the protection of vulnerable groups, there was an agreement that called for a collective effort to foster an environment where open inquiry can flourish, advocating for an educational model that prepares students not just academically but also as informed and empathetic participants in a democratic society. More specifically, the report (forthcoming, July 2024) suggests a need for ongoing dialogue, legal clarity, and institutional courage to navigate the complex

landscape of free speech and democracy on campus; it emphasises the importance of academic freedom in fostering a vibrant, diverse, and inclusive intellectual community.

SOCIAL MEDIA IMPACT

Maintaining Online Presence and Promoting Activities

We have built a robust online presence through our website and social media channels, which serve as key platforms for disseminating information and engaging with a broader audience. All our events and briefings are shared on the [SOAS ICOP Blogsite](#), [Instagram \(@soasicop\)](#) and on [X \(@soasicop\)](#). The majority of our events both at SOAS and Westminster are recorded and shared on our [YouTube Channel \(@soasicop\)](#). Audio recordings of all our briefings are shared on [SoundCloud \(/soasicop\)](#). This spring, using the expertise of one of our Aziz Foundation interns, selected topics have been explained via TikTok videos – five on Prevent and one on the Safety of the Rwanda Bill. Our social media campaigns have resulted in increased participation and engagement.

UPCOMING SUMMER 2024

- “Palestine under Pressure: Constraints on Social Infrastructure” at SOAS on 11 June 2024
- “War on Gaza: Holding Account through International Law” at SOAS on 19 June 2024 **(We shared it on X and it received nearly 13k impressions that’s how many people saw the promo for the upcoming event, this is in addition to nearly 900 engagements (clicks, follows, replies, reposts. This event is much anticipated.)**
- “Water, Land, and Destruction - The Ecocide of Palestinian Resources” at SOAS on 08 July 2024
- “ICOP-CDBU Symposium on University Finances” at SOAS on 15 July 2024
- “Global Chains of Oppression - UK Complicity in Human Rights Violations” at Portcullis House (date: TBC)

PROJECTS 2024-25

- Develop a large UKRI research bid with universities: we are collaborating with universities such as Cambridge, Gloucestershire, Kent, and Queen Mary to develop their interest in our work and engage the university sector more widely.
- Formalise ICOP support for research bids: we provide conduits into Westminster and ready-made platforms for disseminating research through panel meetings in Lords, Commons and Portcullis House. We also have effective social media expertise.
- Showcase SOAS's engagement in policy making with [London Higher](#).
- Expand ICOP's intern programme.
- Develop spin-offs such as: education on understanding and engaging productively with Westminster; executive training on managing conversations on controversial topics and on engaging across generations.
- Professor Alison Scott-Baumann's [AHRC follow-on fund project](#) which deploys Communities of Inquiry provides evidence that her model is very successful; it has been implemented with British Council and universities including: Cambridge, Coventry Gloucestershire, London South Bank, and three medical schools, namely Keele, Kent and Manchester.