



Association of Social Anthropologists

of the UK

Minutes from 2022 AGM

17th May 2022, Zoom

Present:

Simone Abram, Chima Anyadike-Danes, Caroline White, Madelyn Jiqing Ma, Chunhua Huang, Ann Marilyn Strathern, Hannah Knox, Timothy Ingold, Anthony Pickles
Catrina Schwendener, Andrea Pia, Pat Caplan, Ana Chiritoiu, Dianne Hinds, David Mills, Georgiana Gore, Michelangelo Paganopoulos, Helen Lambert, Savita Sathe, Yunxia Wu, Olivia Barnett-Naghshineh, Heike Schaumberg, Ru-yu Lin, Toyin Agbetu, Marion Berghahn, Sarah Winkler-Reid, Joy Hendry

Apologies: Edward Simpson
Chaired By: Simone Abram

1. Minutes of last meeting approved. No matters arising.
2. Approval of accounts.

Accounts presented by RJ and approved by the meeting. RJ reported small surplus of £2000 by the end of the financial year, as a result of success of St Andrews (online) conference.

CAD asked about PayPal fee and whether there is a cheaper service.
RJ explained that the ASA pays the paypal charitable rate of 2.8%.

No objections. Accounts Accepted

3. Update from the Chair. The chair SA presented an update on activities since the last AGM in March 2021 (summarised below). The chair SA welcomed the new members of committee – Anthony Pickles (Conferences), Chima Michael Anyadike-Danes (Membership), Toyin Agbetu (Honorary), Olivia Barnett-Naghshineh (Networks), Sarah Winkler-Reid (Education), Catrina Schwendener (Honorary Treasurer). SA also thanks Camilla Morelli who joined as publications officer but had to step down at short notice.

SA also expressed thanks to Jude Robinson for time as ethics officer after 4 years of service.

Chair's report:

- a) SA announced that short interviews with committee members are now available on the ASA website.
- b) SA provided a summary of membership numbers.

Membership doesn't match the demographics of anthropology departments in UK. Many postgraduates and professional anthropologists are using anthropology matters mailing list and participating in conferences but are not members of the ASA. The ASA is seeking new members via the ASA website, organising more events, and improving communication with membership. Will continue with these initiatives this year in order to raise public profile of ASA.

- c) Conferences. SA reported discussions that ASA committee has been having about the ASA conferences. There will not be a conventional conference in 2022. Instead there will be a series of events focused on an area that the ASA has rarely addressed – education. This will take the form of an extended series of studios each with different form focusing on a different aspect of education and educating. The aim is still to publish a monograph but it may take a different format to usual.

The 2023 ASA conference will be held at SOAS – this will be a more conventional event.

There are also plans for the ASA to organise a Festival of Anthropology which will be a more outward looking event.

- d) Publications. SA reported that the ASA monographs series has moved from Bloomsbury to Routledge. The ASA have a good relationship with the subject editor Katherine Ong. It has been agreed that the ASA monographs should not follow the Routledge corporate image and that paperback monographs will have bespoke design with template for all forthcoming monographs.

The monograph from the ASA Oxford conference is coming out in 2022. The ASA monograph from the UEA conference edited by Emma Gilberthorpe is close to completion.

The ASA has also been supporting editors of Anthropology Matters who are keen to reinvigorate the journal. EASA have withdrawn agreement to support. The current editors have ideas about how to revive it, in particularly making it more of a vehicle to train people to be editors and reviewers.

Also, the ASA has restored the publication of Firth lectures to ASA lecture series.

- e) Annals of Anthropology. SA confirmed that as announced at last the last AGM the ASA has now reinstated the annals of anthropology. These are reports from departments which are updated annually. The ASA would like the annals to reflect all institutions where anthropology is taught (not just anthropology departments), as well as including representations from commercial and charitable organisations that use anthropology.
- f) Register of PhDs. At the last AGM the ASA announced that it will be creating a register of PhDs in anthropology, to be hosted on the ASA website. SA confirmed that all recently completed anthropology PhDs will be contacted about the database, invited to upload abstracts and invited to join the ASA.

- g) A proposal has been made not to require a reference in order to join the ASA. This is discussed below in Motion 1.
- h) Diversity at QAA: SA reported that the ASA committee has been documenting and proposing a plan of action regarding diversity in the QAA. It has become apparent that the subject benchmark statement review committee is lacking in diversity. QAA admitted that they don't have an effective EDI process.
- i) Future of Anthropology in the UK. SA reported that she wrote letter expressing concern over future of anthropology at Goldsmiths where the department is under threat. SA received a standard letter of response. SA confirmed that the ASA will do whatever it can to help departments facing threats of different kinds. SA conducted a review of anthropology departments this year and found a mixed picture. Some depts are growing solidly – some are under threat, some are facing redundancies. It is clear that there is a need for increasing solidarity among professional anthropologists.
- j) SA reported that the ASA is supporting a forthcoming GDAT debate on the topic of Decolonising anthropology.

No questions.

- 4. Q&A about the officers' reports circulated in advance of the meeting.

No questions.

- 5. ASA committee members appointments for ratification: Anthony Pickles (Conferences), Chima Michael Anyadike-Danes (Membership), Toyin Agbetu (Honorary), Olivia Barnett-Naghshineh (Networks), Sarah Winkler-Reid (Education), Catrina Schwendener (Honorary Treasurer)

No objections.

- 6. Notice of vacancy for ASA committee positions

Ethics Officer and Publications Officer

- 7. Membership numbers

Membership numbers – RJ noted that the ASA has a slightly ageing population. It was agreed by the ASA some time ago that people would be able to not have to pay when they retire, so as long-standing members retire the ASA drops off income.

- 8. *Motion 1: New members to no longer need references from two professional anthropologists to join the ASA. The ASA will still reserve the right to seek confirmation of applicants' qualification to practise as an anthropologist.*

HL asked will there still be a mechanism to do the check? Reserving the right to still check people's credentials is not the same as doing the checks. How will the ASA be able to check that someone does actually have the background implied? There is a risk that the association would inadvertently legitimate someone who is problematic.

SA responded that we have suggested that they have the relevant qualifications, and if we are in any doubt we will ask for references.

RJ responded that the application involves citing your qualification – where you qualified and which year. RJ also confirmed that E also googles people to check that their qualifications are real. ASA admin keep an eye on people coming through. In 20 years they have only been asked twice to confirm someone's membership relative to a job application.

MS pointed out that the association doesn't want to be accused of secretly excluding people. It would be a good idea for the ASA to have some impersonal set of criteria of admission. Either have to have a PhD or a job in anthropology. Applicants should have to make an argument to us for why they should give membership. Also need to be clear on the structure of who is making the decision of membership.

SA responded that the ASA will make the evaluation by a committee of the committee including chair, membership and administrator.

David Mills asked what is the definition of practicing as an anthropologist? Could we simply say a masters qualification in anthropology?

Heike Schaumberg suggested that there are quite a lot of people with Masters in anthropology working as an anthropologist outside academy. How does the ASA relate to that?

Tim Ingold pointed out that the ASA is professional body. Fundamental qualification that they should be a professional anthropologist. He wouldn't advocate extending it to masters – but if someone can show they are a professional anthropologist without a PhD then they should be admitted to the association. It is not a pressure group for anthropology it is a group that represents professional anthropologists so needs a professional qualification.

CAD agreed with TI but pointed out that we have a long history of people teaching anthropology without a PhD so PhD not necessary a requirement. A broader question – in what sense do we mean 'professional'? Might be worth thinking about different categories of membership – rather than you are in or out. Thinking about gradations? We can't really wait until everyone has a PHD and a job in an anthropology department.

APia said that as membership numbers are in flux and demographic is changing it is a political decision deciding who the association is in the future. Do we want to mobilise people who might want to appeal to anthropology in different contexts. Might mean creating a new position on committee to create someone who is not a professional anthropologist. Looking to what anthropology is today outside academia.

Helen Lambert pointed out that there are a large number of anthropologists with PhD in anthropology practicing outside academic anthropology departments but within academia. High levels of precarity in anthropology, many are not in secure posts. HL has up to 10 colleagues with PhD in anthropology working in research roles. We want to include these people rather than exclude these people. Need to be careful that anthropologists who work outside anthropology are not rejected as anthropologists!

SA summarised the discussion and suggested that if people have a PhD in anthropology that should be enough to join. If people do not have a PhD but have a masters degree or have been working as a lecturer or in another discipline as an anthropologist then they qualify as an anthropologist. ASA needs to clarify what we consider makes a professional anthropologist by removing requirement to have PhD and a job, just to have a PhD should be quite broad. ASA to remove clause about having a job in a university.

SA suggested that we vote on this and in the process of making the change we will clarify the qualifications.

No objections. The meeting accepts the motion.

SA confirmed that the checks the ASA will run are confirmation of qualifications and checks if necessary via references.

With regards to deleting the requirement to have lectureship or equivalent in anthropology – it was agreed that this would be put out as proposition to the members, with right for response by membership.

RJ pointed out that this could be done by email and an online vote. It doesn't necessarily need to wait a year for another AGM.

9. *Discussion: The ASA and the public profile of anthropology in the UK.* Chaired by CAD.

The ASA recently published an interview with Taras Fedirko who works on the Ukraine. Raised the question of whether the ASA should offer a way of providing people with disciplinary perspective on live topics? Is it something that members would be interested in reading about?

This links to the broader question of how to raise the profile of the ASA generally and how to make it clear to the country's anthropologists that the ASA exists as a service and can be of value to them.

Comments:

Andrea Pia suggested we might not have capacity to develop commentaries on issues that are happening around the world. But there is potential to open up website to more public engagement by providing snippets of knowledge for them to think about. Making clearer what kinds of problems we represent and who we speak to. APia suggested that we might reproduce articles that appear on the conversation – can scan those and reproduce them. Otherwise it would need a concerted effort to raise profile.

Heike said that the obvious danger is that someone reproduces something and because it is on the website it is seen as representative of the ASA as a whole.

Helen Lambert expressed agreement with previous comments from APia about being cautious about problem of selectivity. Randomly coming out with statements can be dangerous and not the most valuable things we can be doing. Limiting things within the remit of what professional anthropologists might want to address would be wise. Would need resource to create a rapid response forum. HL advocates using website to garner support from anthropologists and improve membership numbers first, then thinking about public facing anthropology after that.

SA pointed out that the ASA online is always open to people to send through papers on topical issues.

Anthony Pickles suggested that the two objectives are distinct – putting things on website is not going to amplify in its own right. We are right to be cautious on making statements. A good strategy of engaging audiences looks different now to how it did 5 years ago – having people come through to website is less important today than it used to be.

Tim Ingold said that he does not think producing rapid responses to world events is a good way of presenting anthropology to the public. We should be able to explain what our discipline is without having to sell it on that ground. You shouldn't be trying to sell discipline off the back of world events! It is unethical. We do not our job to be to keep up with the news agenda.

SA suggested that on the ASA website we could make monographs a bit more prominent.

10. AOB

Georgina Gore:

Has been living and working abroad outside an anthropology department. Has not been able to receive any publications because you get notified with customs document that you have to pay €33 – more than subscription! Since membership is made up in part of non-UK based people – may be something think about. Concerns both EASA and ASA.

RJ – We need to go back to Taylor and Francis to see if there are any ways to circumvent customs problem. Do they not have a European distribution wing? **RJ to talk to Katherine Ong and see if there is a way to stop receiving an extra charge.**

SA - Also discussion about whether to distribute as e-books?

David Mills asked about the possibility of pursuing open access publication in addition to publication of ebooks? Has this been considered?

RJ said that this is a good question. Could we cover production of open access monograph through membership? Something we need to look at.

SA said she will ask T&F. When the ASA monographs were moved from Bloomsbury to Routledge the ASA was having this conversation. Will discuss further when new publications officer is in place.

SA thanked everyone for joining online.