

ASA Chair's report to AGM 2023

Committee

The committee has been extremely busy behind the scenes this year, developing a strategy and beginning to implement a number of new measures to secure the future of the association and towards the promotion of Social Anthropology.

This year, we welcomed Dr Anthony Pickle in the role of Conference Liaison officer – he has had a particularly busy year preparing for the conference with the team at SOAS, as well as moving job and home. We congratulate him and wish him success in his new position at Birmingham University and look forward to his continued input on conferences.

We are also pleased to have Timothy Carroll from UCL as our new Ethics Officer. Tim has had an ongoing interest in data privacy issues.

I should like to thank Hannah Knox for her sterling service as Secretary to the committee, and her valuable input into our developing strategy. She is now stepping down from the role after four years, and with your permission, I should like to welcome Dr Connie Smith of Manchester University to take up this role.

As ever, we are very grateful to our administrators, Rohan, Triinu, Elaine and their colleagues at NomadIT, who are, as always, loyal and supportive. They also have an important role as the institutional memory of the organisation.

Membership and Recruitment

The ASA had 434 members in 2022, of whom 166 were full members (with an increase this year to 500/176).

Membership figures are still good, but the member profile is uneven, and, bluntly, ageing. We have discovered rather low awareness of the ASA, and we have been considering how to make younger anthropologists more aware of what the ASA is and why it is important to join. This includes developing and managing expectations – in particular, moving from an expectation of material benefits in return for the fee towards an emphasis on solidarity and fellowship, and the pursuit of mutual benefits among members and others. ASA fees remain considerably lower than other professional associations, and are very affordable. We are working harder to make it clear how the funds are used (publications, events, administration), the opportunities they present to members (eg through funds for workshops and networks), and the importance of solidarity (to keep social anthropology degrees and departments alive and to support new ventures).

To this end, we have devised a **strategy** with various elements:

- A database of PhD abstracts: new graduates will be invited to register, and at the same time invited to apply for membership. This should be live imminently.
- Departmental liaison: we will invite volunteers from all anthropology groups to remind colleagues of the value and benefits of the ASA and encourage them to join or maintain their membership. To this end, we will be having a briefing session at the conference and request support from heads of departments.

- Conference mentoring: we will invite all conference organisers to integrate a system of mentoring for less experienced colleagues and students (eg on how to shape an abstract, propose a panel, make a conference presentation, and navigate the conference system/world). This year we have called this a 'buddying scheme' and around 60 people have signed up.
- A clearer annual calendar – what we might call an ASA ritual calendar. This will include AGM, Annals, alternating conferences/events, Firth lecture, network events, welcome to new members, and an web-based obituary series.
- Clearer profiles of the ASA and its officers on the website, including mini biographies to help raise awareness of the diversity of research across the discipline.

Taken together, these will provide more comprehensive information about the world of Social Anthropology in the UK, from doctoral research to ongoing debates and recognition of established scholars.

Our media officer Andrea Pia is now running a short research project to gather information about membership and potential membership, looking particularly at career trajectories of graduate anthropologists and would appreciate wider support in circulating an online questionnaire that has been devised for this purpose. RA Benjamin Theobald is gathering data about the landscape of UK Anthropology. The report and interviews will be made available on the ASA website in June 23

The additional element to round out this strategy is one of external liaison, to ensure that the ASA is in close touch with anthropologists beyond academia, and with our potential audiences. One element in this is the intent to encourage more anthropologists to present their work at public events, such as literary festivals and the like (see below).

Conferences/festival

We were delighted that the long-awaited SOAS conference has become a reality. We extend our thanks to the team at SOAS and to the institution for its support. I would particularly like to thank Anthony Pickles, the ASA Conference Liaison Officer, for jumping straight into the role and putting in so much work to align the SOAS aims with those of the ASA. New initiatives for this conference include a social media channel 'broadcast your research in 3 minutes' (and if you have not yet recorded your stint, please do that before the end of the conference); a publishers panel, a panel organised by a commercial anthropology partner (although I am sorry to say this was cancelled at the last minute for operational reasons), a buddying scheme, a decolonising agenda plan for the conference. All of this experience bodes well for the next major ASA conference, which will be held in Birmingham in 2025, where Anthony has, coincidentally, just taken up a post in the expanding Department of African Studies and Anthropology.

Through 2022, we held an innovative open conference or distributed conference that took the form of five online 'studios', each running over around a month, between March and June and between October and December, chaired by Sarah Winkler Reid (Newcastle University) with Caroline Gatt (University of Graz), ElSayed Mahmoud ElSehamy (The University of Manchester), Cris Shore (Goldsmiths, University of London), Soumhya Venkatesan (University of Manchester), Simone Dennis (Australian National University), Andrew Dawson (University of Melbourne) and Tim Ingold (University of Aberdeen). We

have learned a lot from the experience, and the organising committee are moving forward with plans for publication of the annual monograph, which will continue with the experimental format.

Our next major conference will be in Birmingham in 2025. As we indicated last year, ASA has now moved to an alternate-year large conference, and we will be much more flexible with our plans for intervening years. This enables us to offer smaller workshops and conferences as well as other kinds of events.

We are now planning for a more outward-looking 'festival of anthropology' in 2024. In discussion with Manchester University and Creative Manchester, we are looking to develop a combined event which will incorporate public talks, films, and artistic activities, possibly including a mass-ethnographic activity. We are also liaising with ESRC. We will circulate further information in due course. If you are keen to be involved, please let us know as soon as possible. While Manchester University has generously offered support for its members to put on events, others might want to apply for Impact Acceleration Account funding, for example.

In the meantime, we have been discussing with the Durham Book Festival the potential for an 'anthropology theme' at the 2023 autumn festival. This is possible partly because Durham university co-funds the festival, and because the festival reports a strong demand for non-fiction talks. We have found a very enthusiastic response to our proposals, and we would strongly encourage other departments to engage with their nearest book festival and put forward potential speakers to festival organisers.

Publications

The ASA monograph series remains with Routledge and we are pleased to have retained a bespoke cover design for the series. Routledge's offer for open access publishing is not affordable for the ASA, so we will need to bear this in mind. We are keen to make the monographs more accessible, with possible consequences for how or whether receipt of the monograph remains a 'members' benefit'. This feeds into a broader question about membership, as noted above, that the committee will be focusing their attention on in the coming year.

Anthropology Matters – which most of you will know as a very effective email list – has published the latest issue of its online journal. The editorial team have faced numerous challenges, including securing reviewers, proof-readers and typesetters. More concerning, they have seen a number of authors withdraw their papers after a long process of editorial support, in order to publish in more prestigious journals. We would urge supervisors to explain to their students that this constitutes very poor practice. However, we are also aware that AM attracts global submissions, and that its editors need continued administrative support. The current editors, Ana Chiritoiu and Phaedra Douzina-Bakalaki, are stepping down, and I would like to thank them enormously for their work on the journal over several years. A new committee subgroup, consisting of Sarah Winkler-Reid, Olivia Barnett Nagshineh, and Chima Anyadike Danes, will convene a meeting of the postgraduate network, aiming to recruit a collective of editors to take on the journal, to ensure that the work is shared a little more widely. The journal has administrative support from Eli Bugler of NomadIT.

Annals

As you will know, we have revived the publication of Annals – departmental information – with good contributions from some departments. We will be requesting updates on a regular basis and urge all departments, groupings or organisations to contribute with their news and progress. This includes departments delivering anthropology degrees yet not formally ‘Departments of Anthropology’, and any other organisations engaged in anthropological activity.

Networks

We note that the networks for the Anthropology of Britain, Apply and AM are particularly active at the moment. ASA now offers up to £900 a year for networks to help them organise events, although this money is rarely requested. We are very pleased to see networking activities and encourage further activity. Please do join the networks for their events during the conference.

Representing anthropology

At the request of Michal Buchowski, I wrote on behalf of the ASA to the Polish ministry of Education and Science to request that it repeal its omission of ethnology and cultural anthropology from the list of approved disciplines in the Polish Academy. I am pleased to say that after several such associations wrote to the ministry, it subsequently announced confirmation that ‘ethnology and cultural anthropology’ is indeed a distinct discipline.

The ASA offered financial support for the GDAT debate, which took place in Manchester on 29 October with an excellent turnout, including a number of online participants, and an excellent line up of speakers. I propose that we formalise our support for GDAT by purpose and budget and will discuss this with Soumhya Ventakasan, GDAT director.

We organised a REF-debriefing for HoDs (or directors of research) in December. The panel chair, Deborah James, kindly agreed to present a verbal, non-recorded briefing for colleagues, with the help of one of the panel members. The future of REF is, as usual, unclear, and we can only speculate on the likely form it may or may not take.

In March 2022, ASA Online issued an interview about the Ukraine War with Dr Taras Fedirko. Since then, he has been approached to publish a long-form version of the interview, and has been interviewed by the Wall Street Journal, both having seen the ASA interview, which Taras tells us is his most read piece ever. A Chinese translation of the interview has had over 40,000 reads.

ASA is a member of the AcSS/ESRC working group on EDI. It will soon be advertising small grants for addressing EDI issues among learned societies. We will follow the development of this scheme closely.

Succession

This AGM is my fourth as Chair, and also my last. I look forward to handing a thriving ASA over to a new chair in 2024.

Simone Abram 3 April 2023.