



# Association of Social Anthropologists

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## of the UK & Commonwealth

### Chair's report to AGM 2020

I took over the role of Chair in April 2020, so this report refers only to the period since that date. I should like to start by thanking Nigel Rapport very warmly for his extended service as Chair of ASA, and wish him the very best for the future.

Since April, the ASA has taken a number of steps, as follows.

The first urgent issue facing me as chair was the 2020 conference that was due to be held in St Andrews that was under threat due to the Pandemic lockdown. In consultation with our conference liaison officer, and the conference organisers, we agreed to postpone the 2020 conference in St Andrews to 2021, in the hope that by then, it would be possible to hold the conference in person, or to adapt to the online situation.

Following this, the committee agreed to hold a short, one-day, single-panel conference in 2020 (tomorrow), to bring together anthropological perspectives on 'pandemics'. This allows us to produce the annual monograph on a topical issue, and reach a wide audience by holding the event online.

Conference arrangements are now in place for 2020 and 2021. I defer further discussion on future conference arrangements to Emma's report.

Our statement on racism in anthropology went live in June 2020 after in-depth conversations with numerous members and advisers. It was also discussed in a HoDs meeting, which addressed this and the Covid-19 response at universities. HoDs agreed they would appreciate an event in the autumn to discuss issues around racism and colonialism in anthropology. Our aim with the statement was not directly to respond to the BLM movement, or to jump on any campaigning bandwagons, but to address longstanding issues in anthropology, and set out where the ASA stands in relation to these. It is important that we acknowledge that colonialism and racism have been significant issues in Anthropology, and that we address them openly. It is perhaps surprising that such a statement has not been made before. More importantly, while the statement is useful, the committee agrees that it is more important for us to act on the issues and not be satisfied with making statements. I have therefore had discussions with various groups about whether they would want to take forward the issues or be involved in future activities. We face a conundrum, since BAME participation is important here, but BAME members should not be left to carry the can on issues of race. The discussion is ongoing, and we hope to produce an action plan in the coming year.

HoDs reported a wide range of responses to the financial challenges that universities are facing from the pandemic effect. Some universities are being quite caring and considerate, others appear to be panicking. Anthropology is in danger in some universities, and I have discussed the situation with the relevant HoDs and sent letters of support where appropriate. We will continue to monitor the situation and offer support where we can.

I have been in conversation with Emma Crewe (SOAS) who recently set up an RAI committee on policy and practice. We agreed that it would be very helpful for anthropologists to be more aware of parliamentary calls for evidence, and Emma offered to circulate up to date calls. She will copy us in to her information so that we can share information via the ASA newsletter. We also discussed the possibility of running some training activities or policy events at future conferences, and I strongly suggested she liaise with the Apply network.

Ro and Simone both attended an online meeting of CEO's of learned societies chaired by the Academy of Social Sciences (AcSS). There was useful discussion of current pressures on societies and associations dealing with postponing conferences and managing membership through the pandemic. It was also clear that the Campaign for the Social Sciences is generating pressure on government to support the social sciences and to appreciate the value of social science both for policy development and for understanding and managing the pandemic response.

On the advice of the AcSS president Roger Goodman, and of Hastings Donnan who is an outgoing member of the AcSS nominations committee, the ASA committee made two nominations to AcSS and will endeavour to make regular nominations to the biannual recruitment rounds, to ensure that anthropology is well represented in the academy. We will do this with an eye to inclusive representation. We see an opportunity for anthropologists to enliven and influence the work of the academy and, more particularly, the campaign for the social sciences. We welcome approaches from individuals who may be interested in joining the academy. Details of the requirements for membership are available from the AcSS's own website.

ASA hosted a meeting of HoDs with the REF panel chair earlier in the year, which raised a number of hot topics. ASA agreed to put forward the following nominations for an additional member of the REF panel with an impact focus:

Haidy Geismar (UCL)

Karen Logan (National Museums NI)

I should like to thank the relevant departments and HoDs for their assistance in making these nominations. We have yet to hear the panel's decision.

ASA responded to the UKRI consultation on open access publishing. Our response largely supported the AcSS response, but included requests for sensitivity around use of 'indigenous Knowledge' and other culturally sensitive non-copyrighted materials.

UKRI has issued a new consultation on PhDs. I will canvas HoDs for comments and compile a response from ASA. Volunteers to help are welcome.

Jon Mair has had to step down now as secretary and Hannah Knox kindly agreed to step up in mid-August. We now seek to recruit an officer to replace Hannah as Media Officer, and would welcome an Education officer to help address issues such as decolonisation of the curriculum, where we believe that the ASA has an important role to play.

We have also extended an invitation to join the committee to the editors of AM (to bring PGR representation to the committee), and we would like to recruit a practising (ie non-academic) anthropologist to join the committee too.

In the next year, our plans include a concerted effort to move forward the debate on decolonisation of Anthropological curricula, and to address in/exclusion in anthropology in the Academy. Building on the examples set by the BSA and the RHS, it will be helpful to start with a survey of race and racism issues in the discipline, before setting out a plan of action to improve the situation (which we already know is problematic).

We aim also to curate more training opportunities for anthropologists, possibly in association with future conferences, hopefully by encouraging more active participation from practice-based anthropologists, publishers, and other relevant advisors. We will also be looking at our recruitment activities, given that lockdown has cut short our plans to visit all departments. We very much welcome departmental support for recruitment, and will be preparing relevant materials for departmental representatives to use.

After a racing start, I very much look forward to working with the committee to see these initiatives through, and to enable our membership to take an active role in the organisation.

Simone Abram  
Chair  
20 August 2020.