

BAAS 2017 MEMBERSHIP SURVEY

Introduction

In April 2017, the British Association for American Studies (BAAS) conducted a wide-ranging survey of its membership. The purpose of the survey was to consult and obtain the views of BAAS members on a number of important issues facing the American Studies community and academia in the UK, more broadly. The survey was designed to investigate four specific issues: the demographic makeup of the American Studies community in the UK; gender inequality and sexual harassment; the health of the discipline; and what BAAS can do to support its members.

The survey was launched at the annual conference, which was held at Canterbury Christ Church University; members were able to complete the survey via Survey Monkey. It involved a mixture of quantitative and qualitative questions. In total, 111 members, ranging from postgraduate students to retired professors, completed the survey.

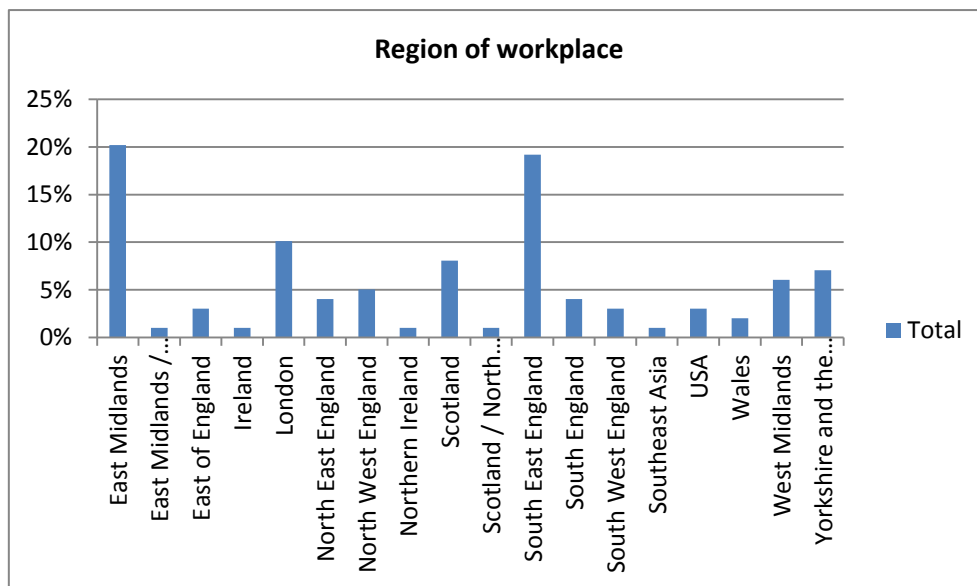
This report outlines some of the findings of the survey. It brings together the different questions into six broad themes:

- BAAS demographics (p. 2)
- Departments and institutions (p. 6)
- Discrimination and harassment (p. 9)
- State of the field (p. 11)
- Looking to the future (p. 14)
- Challenges, suggestions and the role of BAAS (p. 16)

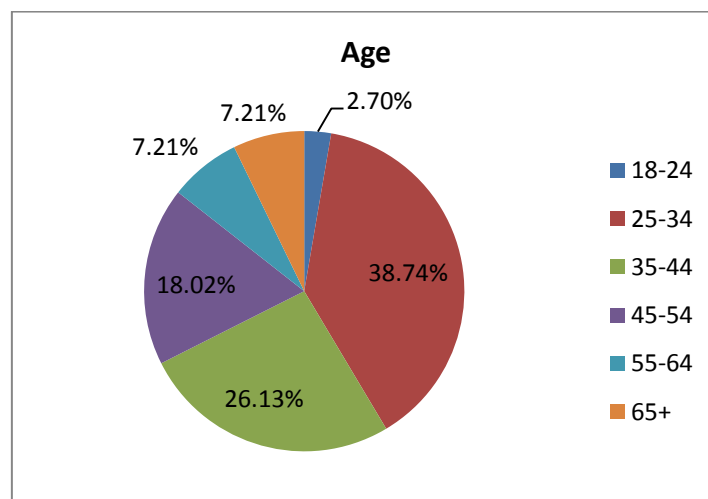
Summary

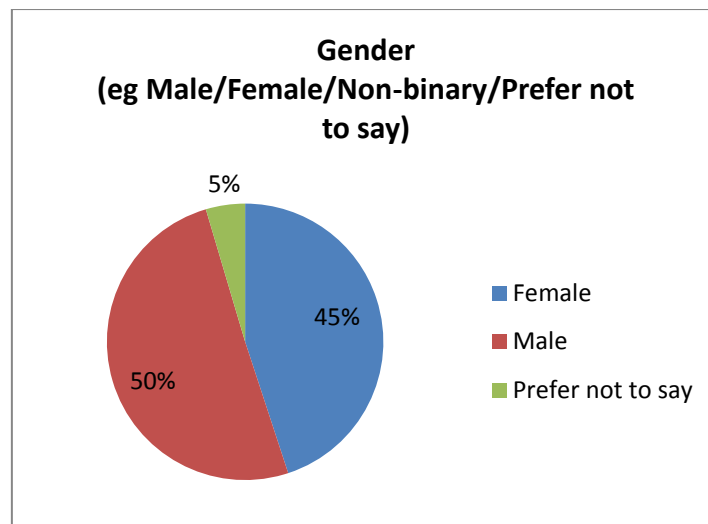
- BAAS produces a wide range of interdisciplinary and multi-disciplinary scholarship
- There is general confidence in the health of American Studies in the UK in terms of its scholarship
- There are a number of concerns about how wider issues in UK Higher Education will impact American Studies, including issues of recruitment and retention of students
- Casualisation of teaching and limited job opportunities are creating additional pressures for postgraduate and early-career researchers
- More needs to be done to improve the diversity of the BAAS membership, which is overwhelmingly white
- Sexual harassment and other forms of discrimination are clearly major problems within UK Higher Education - 45% of women who completed the survey have experienced, witnessed, or been aware of sexual harassment in the workplace.
- In the interest of transparency a full list of members' suggestions has been included at the end of the report. The Executive Committee will continue to consult with members; work continues on a number of initiatives in response to issues and suggestions raised in the survey.

BAAS DEMOGRAPHICS

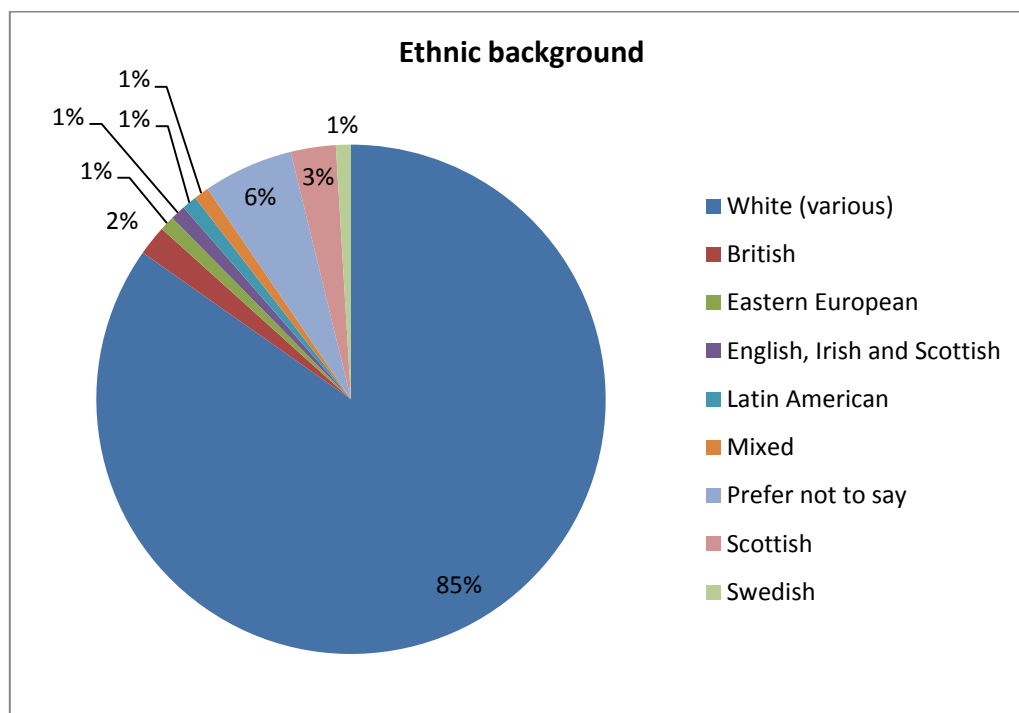


Although BAAS members can be found across the UK, as well as Ireland, the United States, and Southeast Asia, there are significant clusters based in the East Midlands (20%) and South East England (19%). This reflects the large American Studies programmes at the University of Nottingham, University of Leicester, University of Kent, and Canterbury Christ Church University. The next most popular areas are London (10%), Scotland (8%), Yorkshire and the Humber (7%), and the West Midlands (6%).



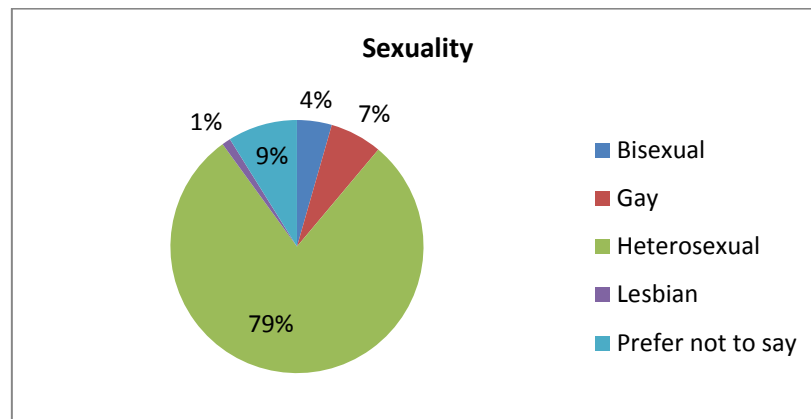


The question on Ethnic Background was left open so that members could choose how they identify, so as to avoid forcing responses into arbitrary criteria. As such, there was a wide range of responses. What is clear from the data, however, is that the overwhelming majority of members identified themselves as white (85%) with only a very small number identifying as either "mixed" (1%) or "prefer not to say" (6%). Nobody among the remaining 8% of members specifically identified themselves as Black, Asian, or other minority ethnic group.

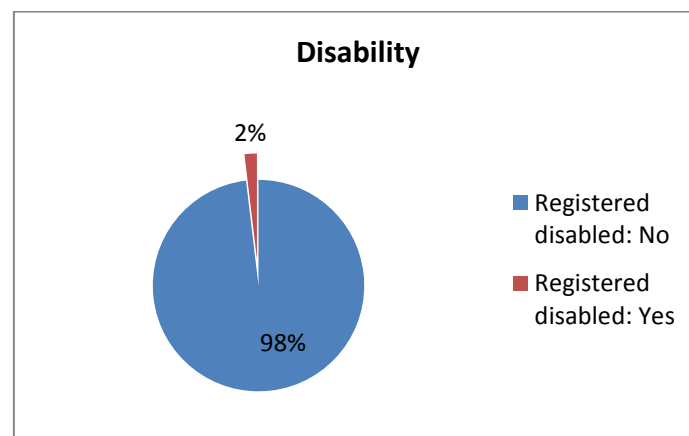


The question on Sexuality was also left open so members could give answers to match how they identify. Of course, this is only a small survey of a specific academic community but it is interesting to note that the UK Office for National Statistics reported in 2016 that 2% of the

"UK population aged 16 and over identified themselves as lesbian, gay or bisexual", compared with 12% of BAAS members who responded to this question.¹



In 2014, the government reported that in the UK "Around 6% of children are disabled, compared to 16% of working age adults and 45% of adults over State Pension age."² In 2015/16, according to HESA, 11% of students at UK HE providers were disabled.³ These figures suggest that people who are registered disabled are profoundly underrepresented in the American Studies community as only 2% of members self-identified as registered disabled.



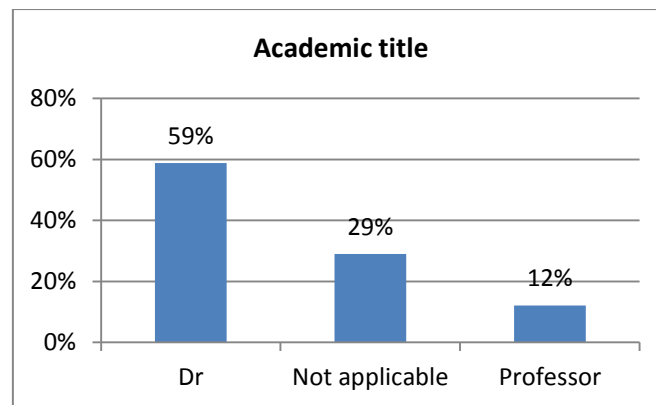
Of those who gave their academic title as Dr, 43% identified as female, 54% as male, and 3% preferred not to say. Those without an academic title were mostly postgraduate students, of whom 55% identified as female, 35% as male, and 10% preferred not to say. Among the 12% of respondents who are professors, 38% identified as female and 62% as male; in real numbers, this was 5 and 8, respectively.

¹ Emily Knipe, *Sexual identity, UK: 2016: Experimental Official Statistics on sexual identity in the UK in 2016 by region, sex, age, marital status, ethnicity and National Statistics Socio-economic Classification*. 4 October 2017.

² <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/culturalidentity/sexuality/bulletins/sexualidentityuk/2016>

³ *Official Statistics: Disability facts and figures*. 16 January 2014. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/disability-facts-and-figures/disability-facts-and-figures>

³ *Changes and trends in the student population*. 9 February 2017. <https://www.hesa.ac.uk/news/09-02-2017/changes-and-trends-student-population>



Subject Area

The survey highlighted the multi-disciplinary nature of the field of American Studies. The three largest sub-fields were History (66%),⁴ Literature (43%), and Cultural Studies (54%). These were followed by Race (32%), Visual Culture (20%), Politics (17%), Screen Studies (15%), International/Foreign Relations (9%). Smaller sub-fields included LGBTQ+ Studies (6%), Art History (4%), Media (2%), Law & Legal Studies (2%), Intellectual History (2%), Childhood, Disability, Indigenous Studies, Sport, Gothic, Transatlantic, Education, Southern Studies, Immigration, Performing Arts (each 1%).

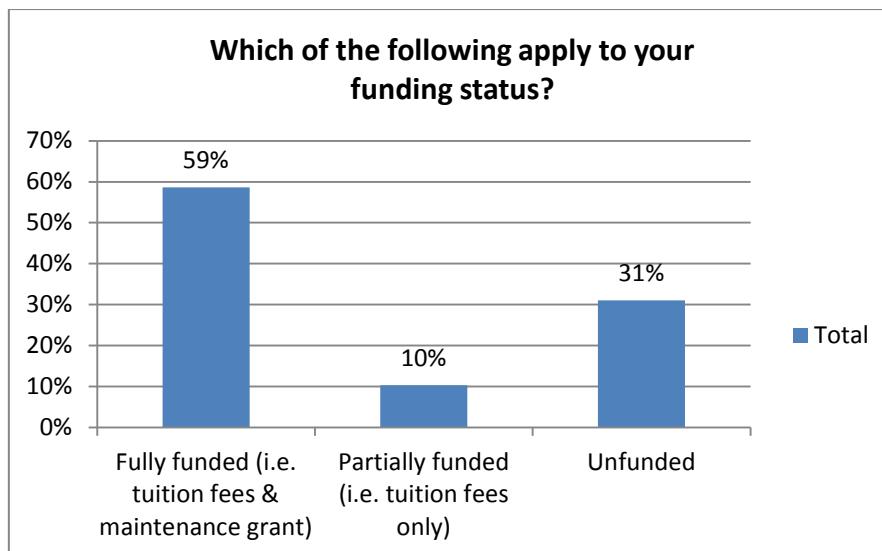
It is also worth highlighting the range of interdisciplinarity within American Studies, with members self-identifying as scholars of, for example, Cultural Studies/History (28%), Cultural Studies/Literature (18%), Cultural Studies/History/Literature (10%), Cultural Studies/History/Politics (8%), History/Literature (12%).

In terms of chronology, the 20th century (64%) is most popular among BAAS members but other periods are also well covered: pre-colonial America (2%), colonial America (7%), Early Republic (6%), 19th century (29%), and 21st century (34%).

Contract

The results revealed the depth of precarious and casualised employment for BAAS members. While 59% of respondents were on permanent and/or full-time contracts, 32% were employed on a part-time, temporary or hourly-wage basis.

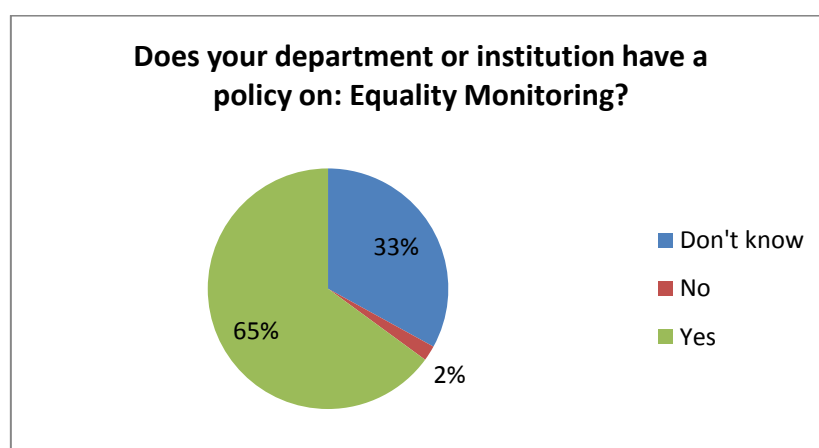
⁴ The figures given here indicate the percentage of members who selected each specific sub-field. Members were allowed to select more than one sub-field.

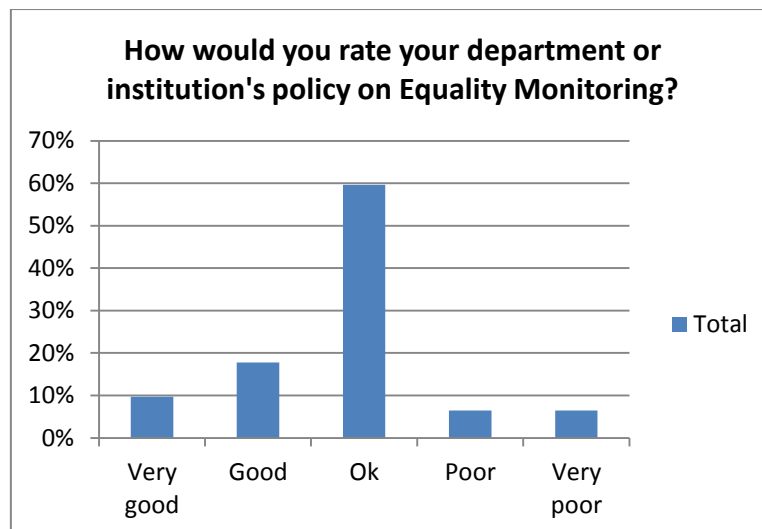


While a clear majority of postgraduate students who responded to the survey receive some funding, with 59% fully funded and 10% partially funded, there remain nearly one-third (31%) of postgraduates who receive no funding at all. This has serious implications in terms of accessibility of postgraduate study in American Studies, as limited funding will restrict access to those who can already afford further study, perhaps because of parental support, or increase poverty levels among postgraduates, which in turn will make their continued study untenable.

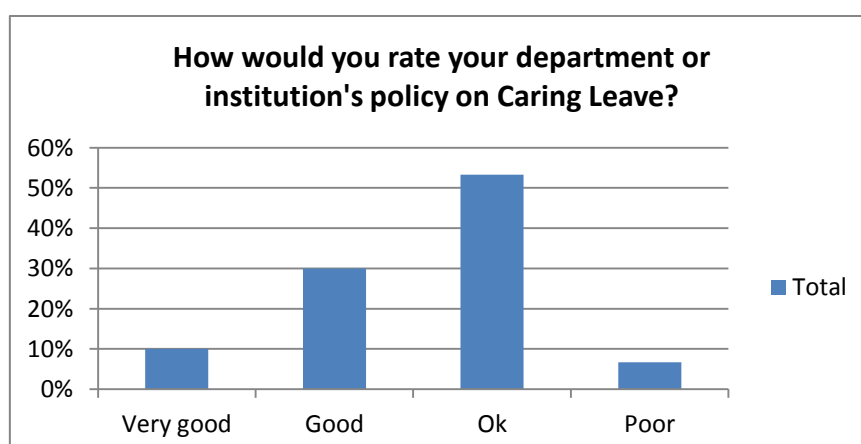
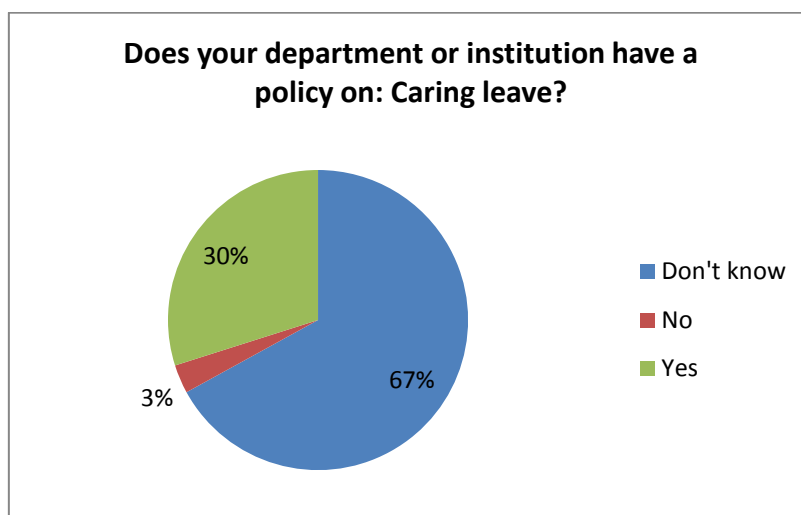
DEPARTMENTS AND INSTITUTIONS

While it is encouraging that 65% of members said that their departments had a policy on Equality Monitoring, 33% of members said their department did not. Of those that answered yes, 28% rated the policy as either "very good" or "good", while 60% said it was just "ok".



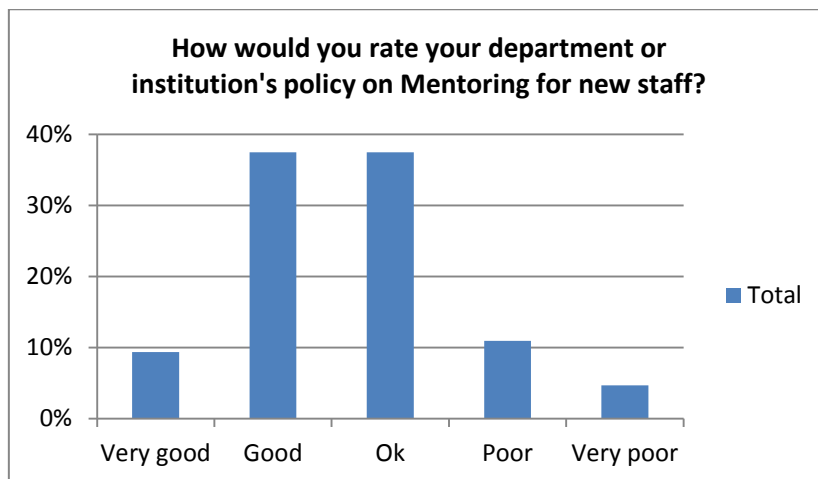
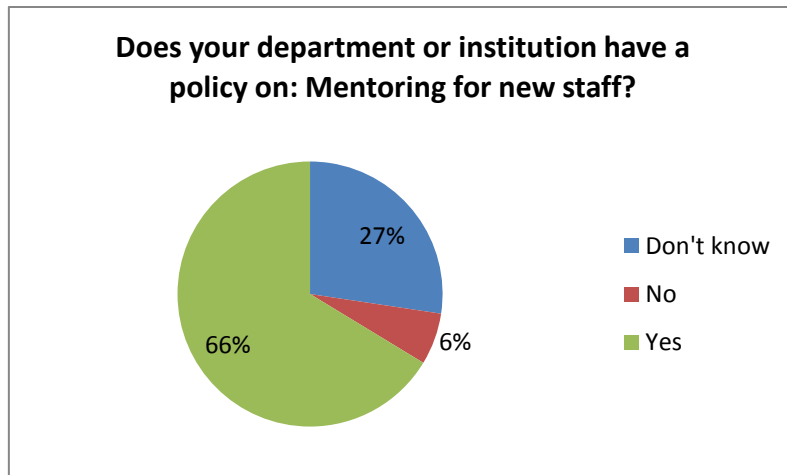


Only 30% of members confirmed that their department or institution has a policy on caring leave, with a large majority (67%) unclear whether there was such a policy at their place of work. Of those who answered yes to this question, 40% rated the caring policy as either "very good" or "good", while just 7% rated it as "poor"; again, a majority (53%) said that it was just "ok".

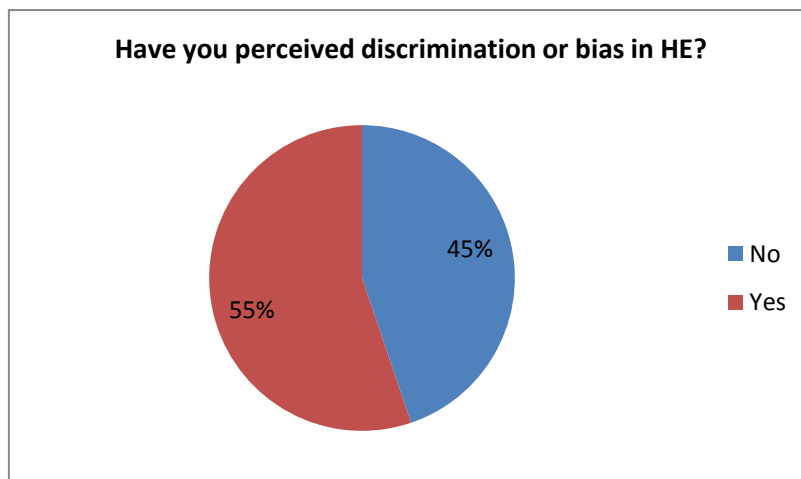


66% of members said that their department or institution had a policy on monitoring new staff. Of the 27% who answered "don't know", two-thirds were postgraduate students and/or teaching

assistants which perhaps explains why they may not be familiar with departmental policy. Of those that answered yes, 47% rated the policy "very good" or "good", while 16% rated it "poor" or "very poor".



DISCRIMINATION AND HARASSMENT

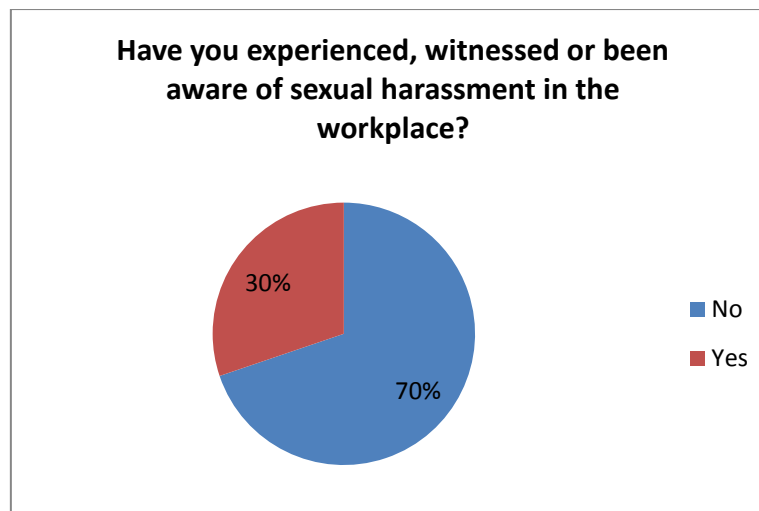


While the data shows that 55% of members have perceived discrimination or bias in HE, the figure increases when looking at the number of women (70%) compared to men (40%). 80% of members who preferred not to identify their gender also answered yes to this question.

The qualitative feedback from members highlighted a number of different issues regarding discrimination and bias in HE. A number of people noted the abundance of "overwhelmingly white and male" seminar series and conference panels. Others noted incidents of age and class discrimination or "against women, people of color, and scholars who use feminist, or women of color theories." In relation to gender discrimination, one member observed a "lad culture" at their postgraduate institution which contributed to a feeling that "teaching and public engagement opportunities were handed out on a less than transparent and equal basis." Another noted the common occurrence of "mansplaining" and a gendered distribution of administrative roles with pastoral roles more likely to be given to female colleagues, while research roles, which are more likely to contribute to promotion, go to male colleagues. One member also highlighted discrimination against those with mental health problems, particularly in terms of doctoral supervisors being unprepared to provide adequate support which manifested in an emphasis on the potential impact "on deadlines [rather] than finding an alternative more supported way of working."

Members responded with a wide range of policy suggestions for institutions and associations on how to improve equality, including:

- "More attention to childcare issues," including crèche at conferences
- Linking monitoring and reporting of equality to HEFCE, QAA ratings, REF, TEF and funding
- Establishing "visible networks and mentoring programmes where they don't already exist"
- Embedding diversity at all levels of academia, from banning all-male panels at conferences to diversifying seminar speakers series and hiring panels.



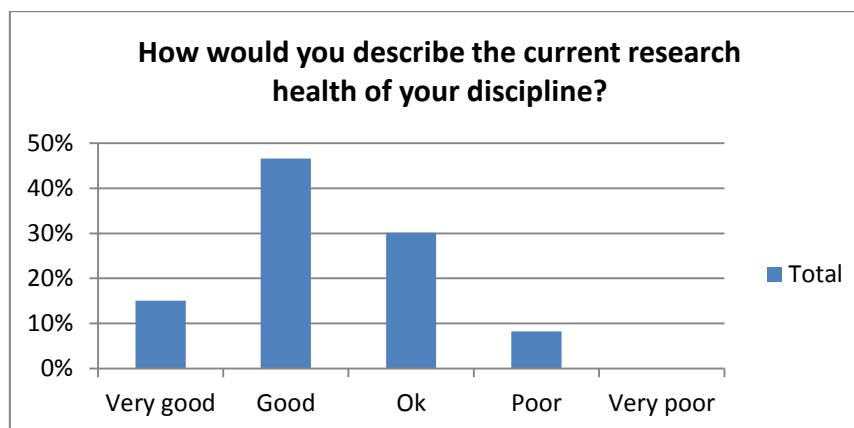
Nearly one-third of respondents said that they had experienced, witnessed, or been aware of sexual harassment in the workplace. Of these, 69% were women. Or to put it another way, 45% of women who answered this question said they had experienced, witnessed, or been aware of sexual harassment in the workplace, compared to just 19% of men answering the same question. This highlights a clearly gendered experience and perception of sexual harassment.

A number of members commented that they had been made aware of or witnessed "male lecturers and postgraduates discussing female postgraduates in sexual manner" or other forms of sexual harassment. One commented that this has "Mainly [involved] innuendo and jokes relating to the way that I dress, my personal life, and sexual preferences." Another postgraduate researcher wrote that sexual harassment "was routine." One member recounted the example of "Several female PhD students [who] were essentially bullied or ignored by male supervisors... One of the students did not finish her PhD, largely as a result of this."

In addition, others noted other "insidious...modes of intimidation and prejudice, such as heads of dept. discouraging or actively holding people back from promotion whilst grooming others for same and for managerial roles."

STATE OF THE FIELD

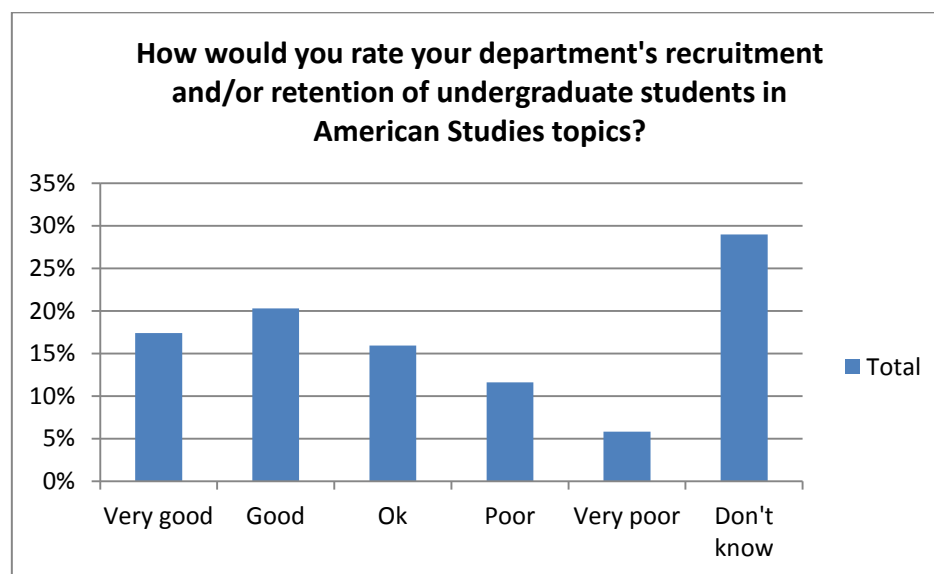
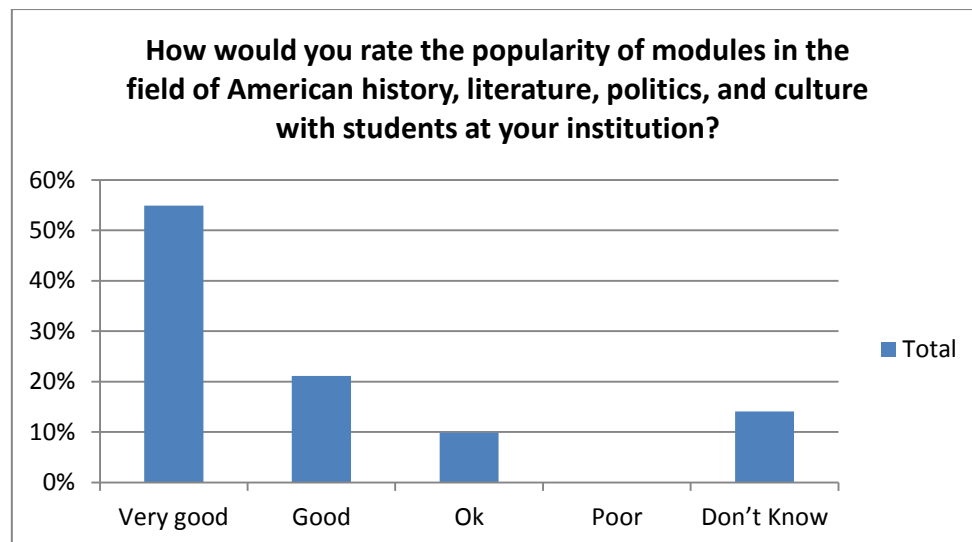
When asked to reflect on the current health of American studies in the UK, a sizeable majority (62%) of respondents answered "Very Good" or "Good," compared to only 8% who answered "Poor". Members identified a number of areas that can be considered strengths, either within their departments or institutions, specifically, or more broadly across the discipline. These included collegiality among colleagues; scope for individual research; vibrant interdisciplinarity; quality and flexibility of teaching provision.



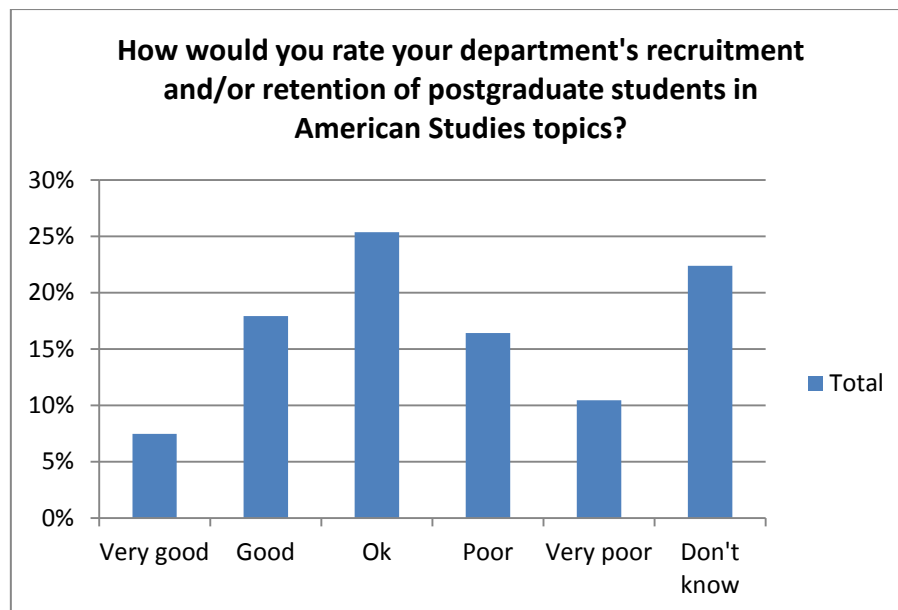
However, there were also a number of areas for concern that were commonly cited by members in their qualitative responses. These concerns included the ability to recruit and retain students; limited research funding and pressure to secure external grants, often without meaningful institutional support structure for doing so; achieving a work-life balance; managing increased teaching, research and administrative workloads; disintegration of American Studies departments; the lack of secure job opportunities for ECRs, many of whom are on precarious and short-term teaching contracts; pastoral and funding support for postgraduates within departments.

When asked at what level there were concerns, 69% answered "undergraduate," 61% "postgraduate," and 33% "post-doctoral". For many respondents, key concerns revolved around the pressure to recruit and retain sufficient numbers of undergraduate students to ensure the financial viability of a course or department. Some felt that this concern was compounded by the increased reliance on precariously employed teaching staff at a time when permanent members of staff are unlikely to be replaced when they retire or move elsewhere.

At postgraduate level, members noted how MA programmes can be undervalued and underfunded. Another member noted that "the drop off in women and BME candidates begins at pgr level. In U.S. history especially there is a masculine culture and very few permanent appointments of women." Others noted the "extremely challenging" nature of the job market which manifests in "the pressures, expectations, and time-demands on both PGs and Postdocs are extreme," which in turn "feeds into the endemic mental health crisis in academia."



Although the survey revealed a number of areas of concern within the field at all levels, members were largely positive about the popularity of American Studies modules; 76% rated their popularity as "Very good" or "Good." There was, however, more concern about the recruitment and retention of undergraduate students in American Studies; only 37% responded "Very good" or "Good", while 18% said "Poor" or "Very poor." The qualitative responses revealed a number of different perspectives as some came from colleagues within American Studies departments and some from, most often, History or English departments. The latter were confident in the popularity of American Studies modules, especially those on U.S. history. For American Studies departments, the challenge is less about recruiting students for their modules and more about recruiting students for their courses. As might be expected, there were varying responses to how successful individual departments have been in recruiting and retaining students on American Studies courses. While some noted that undergraduate numbers have been declining and even seen programmes closed in recent years, for others recruitment has remained "healthy."



At postgraduate level, 25% rated recruitment and/or retention in American Studies "Very good" or "Good," compared to 26% who rated it "Poor" or "Very poor." Members identified four key issues that impact recruitment at postgraduate level: 1) poor undergraduate recruitment in American Studies or a lack of a dedicated American Studies programme has a knock-on effect at postgraduate level; 2) difficult to recruit PhD students without offering a Master's in American Studies; 3) lack of Americanist staff means students go elsewhere; 4) lack of internal and external funding hinders recruitment. One member noted that their department struggled to recruit PhD students "because of a perception that it's academic suicide to do an American History PhD outside of America."

Asked whether there are any issues around the recruitment and/or retention of faculty and related staff, members noted a number of problems including: lack of diversity among new staff, especially in terms of ethnicity, sexuality and non-US/UK nationality; scarcity of entry-level, permanent lectureships; heavy teaching loads for junior staff; high-level of competition for casual teaching; high turnover of staff without replacing those who leave.

LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

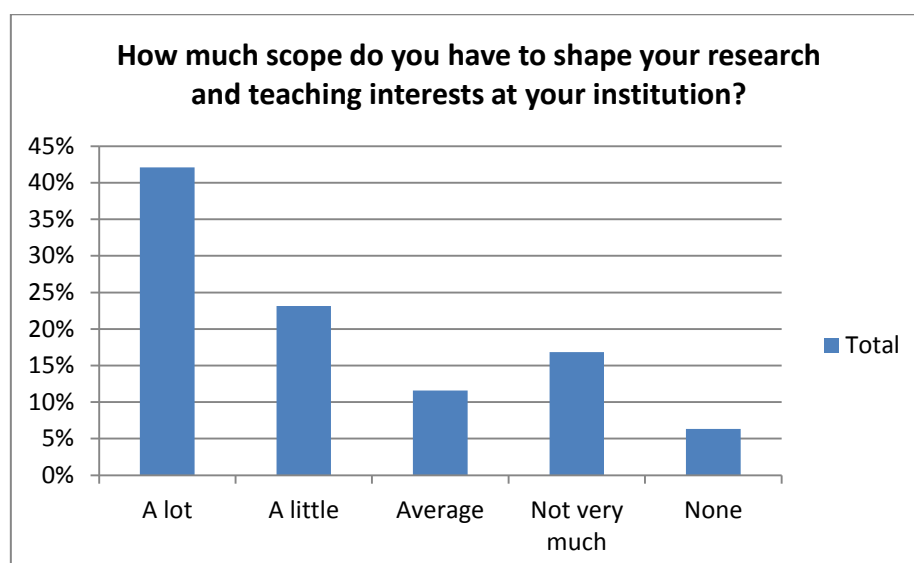
Emerging Subfields

Responses to the survey highlighted the interdisciplinarity and innovative scholarship within the field of American Studies in the UK. While growth in areas such as digital and medical humanities may be linked to research council funding opportunities, members also highlighted interest in a wide-range of emerging areas, including Latinx studies, border studies, print culture, environmental issues, eco-criticism, comics, violence studies, American religious history, evangelicalism, animal humanities, spatial theory, Native American studies, gender studies, black intellectual history, global history, archives, memory, museums, music, cognitive literary theory, philosophy, travel writing, networks, race and critical race theory.

Future Sustainability

Members offered a number of suggestions for enhancing the future sustainability of American Studies in the UK, which can be broadly divided into three areas. First, members identified the issue of recruitment to undergraduate American Studies programmes. As such, one member suggested departments and organisations such as BAAS need to strengthen "links with teachers and schools to fully explain what American Studies is." Engaging with schools and colleges will not only help promote the discipline but also recruit diverse students to American Studies programmes. Linked to this point is the importance of emphasising the "employability" skills that American Studies degrees can provide, perhaps by highlighting the diverse range of careers American Studies graduates pursue.

Second, investment is required to support postgraduates, early career scholars, and "research collaborations between established and new scholars," including development of international networks. One member also suggested being "more proactive in promoting altac options within American studies, and the transferrable skills of PG education." As the survey highlighted on a number of occasions, job opportunities within academia are few, highly competitive, and often exploitative. Third, closer collaboration within and between institutions, BAAS, and external cultural partners.



Research Excellence Framework (REF), Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF)

The ongoing Research Excellence Framework (REF) and newly implemented Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) are both significant factors in departmental, institutional, and individual career planning. The range of response to both exercises was wide-ranging.

Attitudes towards the REF were partially dependent on how well respondents' departments had done in the 2014 REF. Those whose departments received high scores were slightly more positive about the forthcoming REF cycle because of the "positive PR" and "authority in the university" that the 2014 REF resulted in. Some respondents noted an increasing emphasis on public engagement and impact, while others reported that research leave and sabbaticals "are no longer granted via a rota but via a competitive process and some people get none, others get a lot." More worryingly, commenting on the 2014 REF, one member reported stories "of a culture of bullying, intimidation, and threats, where colleagues were, in effect, told their jobs were in imminent danger if they did not meet the university's requirements. This time round, so far, that has been absent, although it lurks under the surface of the language of "support and preparation" for REF2021."

There were also a number of contrasting responses to the introduction of the TEF, which was particularly apparent when comparing those at an earlier stage in their careers with more senior colleagues. For example, while acknowledging the hesitation of senior colleagues regarding the TEF, one early career member said they were going to use it "as inspiration to be bold and innovative." Another captured the discrepancy in experiences, stating "I feel fortunate to be at the start of my career, as I am already undergoing teaching training and have been encouraged to reflect on my ongoing pedagogical development since I started teaching as a TA 5 years ago. However, there are others in my department who are finding it frustrating to rejig their teaching approaches, or to undergo supplementary training, to anticipate the demands of the TEF."

Even so, not all early careers or postgraduates were positive as the TEF is seen as creating additional pressure, affecting hourly paid teaching rates, and potentially making it more difficult to find employment beyond casual teaching. There was also some suspicion about the purpose of the TEF, with one member categorising it as "a reductive way of measuring teaching excellence." Another member observed that "New policies seem aimed at improving Survey results rather than actually improving teaching or student experience." While one member noted that "It has led to a beneficial reform of my department's approach to marking and moderation", another commented that "Marking time has been reduced to allow for quicker feedback."

CHALLENGES, SUGGESTIONS, AND THE ROLE OF BAAS

The survey was also designed to give BAAS members space to outline some of the challenges facing academics at all stages in their careers in the current HE climate.

The most common concern identified was the challenge of securing permanent, full-time employment in academia at a time when such jobs appear to be decreasing, while the number of qualified candidates is increasing. As one member observed,

The requirements for academic roles are so high, there is never enough time to build a strong enough research portfolio during the PhD - to publish enough, to organise enough events, to set up strong enough networks. Also, departments offer some opportunities for teaching, but it is never possible to gain enough experience teaching all levels of UG and MA courses, as well as lecturing and module design, as a GTA.

Limited job opportunities go hand-in-hand with limited security; increasing casualisation and precarity within the sector is a serious concern for many BAAS members. As another member noted, "Temporary and adjunct jobs provide no security and particularly affects [sic] women perceived as child-bearing age." A number of people highlighted the limited funds for research and the problem of attracting large grants, with one commenting that "for parents it is even worse as most grants do not pay childcare costs, and you have to travel in School holidays."

In terms of suggestions for the development and sustainability of academic careers, the most common response was for a greater investment in salaried, full-time contracts for ECRs, particularly ones that don't end as soon as teaching stops. As for suggestions of specific activities that BAAS could pursue, these included widening participation outreach to increase diversity within the field; support for the transition from PhD to post-doc, such as workshops on grant applications, writing book proposals, or developing the second project; mentoring; placements; and sessions addressing mental health issues.

BAAS Activities

When asked for suggestions for how BAAS could improve communication between members and the Executive Committee, respondents made a number of useful proposals, including:

- Using online polls and votes during the AGM
- Anonymous forms on BAAS website
- Question box at conference registration
- Facebook Live sessions for the Executive Committee to consult directly with members beyond the AGM
- "Meet the Executive" events coinciding with Committee meetings.

Do you have any suggestions about how BAAS might provide more support to scholars at your career stage?
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Funding for American students wanting to study in Britain would be great - our at least more resources. It's a big leap of faith to study a PhD outside your home country, especially when your

home country is also your subject area, but I think it can be incredibly rewarding and has an important methodological distance.
Approach funding bodies or universities with PGR's in American studies as I wasn't made aware of BAAS until much later in my PhD process.
Encourage institutions to increase the amount of full-time positions.
Build a greater sense of community across the UK - not just in SE England.
Second project funding grants would be very useful - seed funding to do archival work and get a second project off the ground.
If a department has a number of PGR's working on American Studies, it would be useful to contact us directly as it would have really helped if I had known about BAAS in the early stages of my studies.
More Early Career specific events / support
I think BAAS does a good job on this in terms of holding events on these issues and offering funding opportunities. I'd say more of the same - perhaps an event with a focus on Teaching Fellowships as well as a statement from the Chair and Committee on exploitative issues that are effecting scholars fresh out of their PhD.
By working with universities to create employment opportunities for ECRs. By working with PhD candidates and ECRs on research and collaborative projects.
Channel extra funding into Postdoctoral opportunities, which will help to support more ECRs, and to ensure that they are competitive when tenure track positions arise.
A first book institute or writing retreat A cross institution mentoring system
Local meet-ups/seminars
More placement opportunities to work in public institutions
As much support as possible for early career (post-PhD, pre-lectureship) scholars would be beneficial. For new lecturers, perhaps mentoring opportunities (on developing academic career after the first project) would be helpful.
Tailored career and interview advice
Regular PG/ECR reading groups would be a good way to foster community and provide research support.
Facilitate engagement between early/midcareer and senior scholars. Senior scholars aren't so active on BAAS social media channels, or at events (beyond those on the exec)
Advice and information about alternative career pathways.
I think BAAS does a good job at all levels. However, I do like the idea of mentoring (see Q.47) which I think I would find very helpful (both as mentor and mentee).
I really appreciate BAAS's particular focus on supporting PGs and ECRs. I also think the various initiatives - the forums held at recent conferences - have been really smart interventions which sometimes helpfully cut across career stage.
I think an hourly paid or even freshly graduated and unemployed network would be nice. A "top ten tips" page on the website might help too. After this conference, I have found out lots of useful information that I didn't know (you do't know what you don't know right).
A dedicated early career section of the web site, mentoring opportunities, discounted conference rates
A prize for academic leadership in American studies might go some way to reward and recognize colleagues who support and mentor others within and around BAAS. It would help mid career academics with promotion and offer public recognition of good citizenship
More publishing opportunities in American Lit. JAS reads much like a history journal.
ECR workshops at conferences? Grant-writing workshops?
i honestly think that higher education is one of the most inclusive and open-access fields of employment and BAAS should drop the social justice warrior positive discrimination statues and

conference practices
more grants set aside for staff at intermediary levels
Improving the standard of papers presented at BAAS conference. I'm reluctant to invest a large part of my annual research allowance in attending panels that seem thrown together rather than carefully assembled.
Grant writing workshops, workshops on how to turn a string of publications and modules taught into a little empire that attracts postgraduates (I'm mid career).
Fellowships and scholarships for senior faculty would be good...
Possibly the provision of more seminars and other events, enabling students to network more with each other and to link up with others in the same field, even by using skype or conferencing. Studying for a PhD can seem like a solitary experience and increased networking with colleagues could also provide more knowledge of employment opportunities
I am retired . (You might have given me a box to tick for that.) There are quite a few of us who are still publishing books and essays, supervising pgs, examining and so on. BAAS might consider some support for activities like the American Intellectual History Group which no longer has financial support from the Mellon fund, and can't support pg members as it did in the past. The death of its leader also cut out the Cambridge support we used to have. (Richard King is now the man who runs this.) It includes half a dozen retirees, but also ECs and pgs.